# European Union Cities Gateway – North America 2025-2028

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for EU and North American Cities & Regions applying to cooperate within the European Union Cities Gateway (EUCG) for the period 2025-2028



**"The information provided in this document is for informative purpose only and cannot be considered as binding"**

# 1. General Questions: What is it? How does it work? …

| Question | Answer |
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| **1.1** What is the EUCG-North America program and who finances it? | The EU Cities Gateway – North America (EUCG-NA) is a European Union-funded program that fosters *city-to-city* and *region-to-region* cooperation between European, U.S., and Canadian cities and regions (including states and provinces), with a focus on urban and regional development, innovation, and partnership-building. The EUCG-NA enhances transatlantic collaboration by bringing local actors together to co-develop practical solutions to shared urban and regional challenges and promote forward-looking urban transformation. |
| | The EUCG-NA aims to connect European and North American cities and regions — and the networks within which they operate — to jointly tackle global challenges at the local and regional level, as part of the EU's external action in key areas such as energy, climate, circular economy, and research and innovation. The EU Cities Gateway strives to deliver tangible outcomes through structured consultations, thematic networks, associated events, and support for pilot initiatives, using knowledge products such as workshops, podcasts, webinars, networking events, and study visits. Through these activities, the program fosters concrete impacts — for example, enabling cities to co-develop and test nature-based solutions, advance circular practices, strengthen local innovation ecosystems through partnerships between municipalities, academia, and businesses, implement pilot actions that reduce pollution or waste, and enhance the capacity and international profile of participating cities and regions. By promoting peer-driven, collaborative, and participatory exchanges, the EUCG-NA helps local and regional governments access innovative approaches and work together with research institutions, civil society, and private sector partners. |
| | Capitalizing on the results and lessons learned from previous European Union-funded cooperation in North America—including the **International Urban and Regional Cooperation (IURC) program**, the **International Urban Cooperation (IUC) program**, the **Global Covenant of Mayors (GCoM)**, and the **International City Partnerships – Acting for a Green and Inclusive Recovery**—the EUCG-NA also collaborates closely with ongoing initiatives such as the **Transatlantic Sustainable Transition Initiative (TSTI), Low Carbon Business Action (LCBA), Arctic Urban and Regional Cooperation (AURC)**, and the **Regional Development Policy for Industrial Transition.** These past and present initiatives have created a broad and diverse network of partnerships, providing a strong foundation to build on, leverage, and consolidate EUCG-NA as a global reference point for urban and regional innovation. |
| | The EUCG-NA is financed under the [EU Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI)](#) and managed by the [Service for Foreign Policy Instruments](#) (FPI) in close collaboration with DG REGIO, and other relevant DGs. The program contributes to the objectives of the New Urban Agenda of the UN, the Agenda 2030 (SDGs), the Urban Agenda for the EU, in alignment with the strategic priorities set out in the EU Cohesion Policy, the European Green Deal, the European Green Industrial Deal, and the Paris Agreement.". |

| 1.2 | How does it work? | The program supports knowledge exchange through a mix of online tools — such as webinars, podcasts, and digital learning — and in-person activities, including study visits, networking events, thematic meetings, and peer-to-peer sharing of best practices. |
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| | | Cooperation is organized through **Thematic Clusters** (or networks), which serve as the main entry point to the EUCG-NA. These clusters connect groups of European and North American cities (Canada and the United States) and regions to collaborate on one of four focus areas 1) Circular Economy, 2) Nature Based Solutions, 3) Digitisation and Urban Innovation and 4) Afford-able and Attainable Housing and Innovative Living Spaces). Participants in a cluster take part in a series of online and on-site activities and work together in smaller working groups to co-design a thematic pilot project, with guid-ance/support from the EUCG-NA expert team. |
| | | **Planned activities include:** |
| | | • Selecting approximately **32 cities and regions** from the EU, Can-ada, and the United States to participate in online and on-site cluster activities, networking events, and related activities. <br> • Targeted cooperation focused on developing and implementing pilot projects. <br> • Study visits and exchange opportunities for participating in cities and regions. <br> • Publication of thematic reports and best practice case studies. |
| | | Ongoing development of and access to the EUCG-NA Knowledge Library, which provides resources and insights from global partnerships. |
| 1.3 | How long is the cooperation intended to last? | The cooperation will last for up to **36 months (within the period 2025-2028)** |
| | | The EUCG-NA program encourages cities and regions to continue their cooperation beyond this time, such that they themselves commit appropriate resources to continue a rewarding cooperation into the future. |
| 1.4 | When does it start? | During the application process (01 July - 31 August 2025), a series of information and promotional webinars will be launched. After the evaluation, selection and notification of selected cities & regions (early September) activities are expected to kick off in late **September 2025.** |
| 1.5 | Which are the cooperation topics? | The EUCG-NA structures its cooperation around four specific thematic clus-ters: **Nature-based Solutions**, **Circular Economy**, **Digitalization and Urban Innovation**, and **Affordable/Attainable Housing and Innova-tive Living Spaces**. |
| | | These clusters form the foundation of the program's cooperation frame-work: |
| | | • **Nature-based Solutions** support cities and regions in addressing local challenges through green infrastructure, ecosystem-based |

|  |  | design, and community-driven approaches to resilience and adaptation. |
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|  |  | • **Circular Economy** focuses on shifting from linear to circular models, covering areas such as waste and resource management, local value chains, resilient food systems, and green business models. |
|  |  | • **Digitalization and Urban Innovation** help cities adopt smart, data-driven tools to improve governance, service delivery, and citizen engagement, while promoting ethical and inclusive use of technology. |
|  |  | • **Affordable/Attainable Housing and Innovative Living Spaces** support cities and regions in creating secure, accessible, and innovative housing solutions that strengthen livability, social inclusion, and community resilience. |
|  |  | A strong horizontal focus on sub-national diplomacy and EU business solutions underpins all clusters. In addition, cross-cutting priorities such as gender equality, inclusivity, and Indigenous engagement — where geographically relevant — are mainstreamed throughout all activities and working processes supported by the EU Cities Gateway – North America team. |
| **1.6** | What happens in a Thematic Cluster? | Our thematic clusters are **open** to cities and regions in the EU, Canada, and the USA. Thematic clustering creates concrete, theme-oriented ***synergies*** (*cross-fertilization*) among specialists from EU and non-EU cities and regions, adding global value. Each thematic cluster is coordinated by the experienced EUCG-NA team and includes:

**a)** Participation in **annual in-person networking workshops or events** for senior leaders (mayors, governors, chief executives, or general managers) and technical experts. These sessions support high-level discussions on governance and technical topics. The EUCG-NA project will provide financial support for participation.

**b)** Participation in **bi-monthly thematic knowledge-sharing online sessions** (60 minutes), which feature:
• Coordination by EU champion cities or regions
• Thematic input and moderation by IURC thematic cluster managers
• Presentations (pitches) by EU and North American cities and regions to share challenges and best practices
• Preparation for the joint development of demonstration projects on key topics

**c)** Participation in **bi-monthly coordination meetings** (60 minutes) within each thematic cluster focused on a concrete pilot action, featuring:
• Definition of feasible, replicable pilot projects for short-term implementation
• Mapping of interests, stakeholders, possible funding sources, and expected outcomes
• Monitoring progress and scaling up results |

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| **1.7** | What are the expected results from the EUCG-NA participation in the program? | A key goal of the EUCG-NA program is to generate tangible progress and impact through bilateral and multilateral cooperation between cities and regions in the EU, Canada, and the USA. This cooperation will focus on four main topics: **Nature-based Solutions**, **Circular Economy**, **Digitalization and Urban Innovation**, and **Affordable/Attainable Housing and Innovative Living Spaces**. |
| | | Each participating city or region will develop an **Urban or Regional Cooperation Action Plan** — a roadmap that outlines shared objectives, concrete actions, joint pilot projects, and contributions to best practices. Participants are expected to define pilot actions and document the knowledge exchange so that lessons learned can be shared through the [EUCG-NA Knowledge Library](#). |
| | | Throughout the program, the EUCG-NA team will support cities and regions in advancing their Action Plans from design to implementation within the project period. |
| **1.7** | Can a city or region apply from more than one department or policy area? | Cites/regions are expected to coordinate internally and submit only one application. |
| **1.8** | Can we join more than one thematic cluster? | While it is possible to participate in more than one thematic cluster, it is preferred that cities/regions focus efforts on their selected cooperation framework built around a thematic cluster. |

## 2. Costs & Funding

| Question | | Answer |
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| **2.1** | Which costs are covered by the program? | The program covers **travel costs for up to three *Thematic Events*** (one per year) for selected pilot cities & regions who are actively involved in the on-line activities of the program. The number of **delegates** to be funded will be: |
| | | → Up to **1 delegate** for the three international thematic events in 2026, 2027 and 2028, and |
| | | → Up to **2 delegates** for a thematic cluster/network launch events to be held in the end 2025 or early 2026 (1 event per thematic network/cluster). |
| | | These costs include round-trip economy class flights, visa application costs, arrival and departure transfers at destination (where needed), accommodation and meals. |

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| | | Also, a team of EUCG-NA experts including cluster managers, knowledge transfer or communication experts from the program, will be assigned to support and facilitate the cooperation process during the events.<br><br>**Advanced Cooperation Visits.** The EUCG-NA Program may finance:<br>→ up to **3 city or regional delegates** for a **5-day** study visit to EU, Canadian or USA city(s).<br>→ Hosting a **reciprocal visit** from your counterpart city(s) in the EU, Canada or the USA.<br>→ The advanced cooperation visit will aim to implement a concrete **pilot project** and will be supported by an IURC expert. |
| 2.2 | Is my city expected to pay any direct costs? | **No.** However, your city/region must commit to providing human resources (e.g. time from staff members as required) to support the cooperation process.<br><br>Also, all participant cities will host a study visit of city(s) in your working group over the course of the EUCG-NA program. When you host a visit, your city may offer to provide for some hospitality costs such as local transport, coffee breaks, or a welcome dinner for the participant in the study visits in case it is possible. This has been the experience with most past EU-financed urban/regional cooperation programs. |
| 2.3 | Is there any funding provided to implement action or projects? | As a rule, the EUCG-NA program does not supply full funding for pilot projects. However, in 2026/27, a **competitive fund** will be launched to co-finance the best pilot actions proposed by the European pilot cities or regions. The amount is not a cash contribution but a commitment to disburse project resources of up to €10.000. Further, the EUCG-NA teams will provide information on possible financing sources Internationally, in Europe, Canada and the USA. |

# 3. Eligibility Requirements & Call Procedures

| Question | Answer |
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| **3.1** Who is eligible to apply? | ✓ **Cities, metropolitan areas or regions of EU Member States** with more than <u>100,000 inhabitants</u> are eligible to apply.<br>✓ **Canadian and USA cities, metropolitan areas or regions** with more than <u>100,000 inhabitants</u> are eligible to apply.<br>✓ **Northern/Arctic Regions** can apply without meeting the city size eligibility criteria. If this applies to your city/region, please mark in Section 1.4 in the Application form.<br><br>*¹For the EUCG-NA program a <u>city</u> is defined as a <u>local administrative unit (LAU)</u> where a majority of the population lives in an <u>urban cente</u>r of at least 100 000 inhabitants.* |
| **3.2** Are there population limitations for applications? | **For city-to-city cooperation:** EU, Canadian or USA cities or Metropolitan Areas (MA) with more than <u>100,000 inhabitants</u> are eligible to apply. In the case of MAs, **a lead entity or city must be designated.**<br><br>**Northern/Arctic Regions** can apply without meeting the city size eligibility criteria. If this applies to your city/region, please mark in Section 1.4 of the EU Cities Gateway Application. |
| **3.3** When will the call be open for EU cities to apply? | The call opens on early July 2025 and closes at **<u>midnight on 31 August 2025.</u>**<br>Selected cities and regions are expected to be notified in early September 2025 |

# 4. Application Process

| Question | Answer |
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| **4.1** What are the steps for EU cities applying for the program? | 1. Make sure your city/region is eligible according to the information provided presented in this FAQs and in the application form.<br><br>2. Complete the ***application form*** *for cities* or *regions.*<br><br>3. Applicants are expected to be notified if they have been selected or not by early September 2025 |

| | | 4. Cities/regions in their thematic clusters will initiate work together in September-October through online meetings. |
| --- | --- | --- |
| | | 5. An in-person Thematic Cluster workshop will be held in North America in late 2025 or early 2026. If your application is successful, you will be notified of the exact dates and location when you receive your selection results in early September 2025. |
| **4.4** | What profile and experience should the main contact /coordinator from the city or region have? | The main contact / coordinator for your city should ideally have a solid track-record of experience in international cooperation and should be able to act as a delegate for decision-making on the activities of the project and be able to represent your city or region at international meetings and events. **The designated person needs to be fluent in English.** |
| **4.5** | For City Applicants only: Is it important to have a Sustainable Urban Development Strategy or similar document which is aligned with challenges that support your planned area of cooperation? | **Yes.** The EUCG-NA intends to support the implementation of integrated strategies. Your city must have an integrated city strategy for sustainable urban development or similar document. |
| | **4.6** For Region Applicants only: Is it important to have a Smart Specialization Strategy or similar document which is in alignment with challenges that we want to exchange on? | **Yes.** Regional applications shall be in line with the regional institutional architecture of Smart Specialization Strategies or at least mention how the EUCG-NA application connects to the area of cooperation / thematic clusters that you have selected. |

**Annex: Thematic Networks, Clusters & Cross Cutting Themes**

EUCG-NA will structure its cooperation around four specific thematic clusters, which will serve as the foundation of the program's cooperation framework. These include:

- **Nature-based Solutions**: this thematic cluster supports cities and regions in addressing urban challenges through sustainable, green infrastructure and nature-based approaches. Its primary objective is to enhance urban resilience and foster adaptation by integrating natural systems into planning and development. Activities may include co-developing innovative nature-based infrastructure, applying ecosystem-based solutions to mitigate urban and regional risks, and supporting the energy transition through environmentally sensitive design. The cluster will also seek to engage First Nations communities in both Canada and the United States, recognizing the value of traditional knowledge, storytelling practices, and community-based approaches to sustainability. Their participation will enrich the exchange of ideas and promote inclusive, locally grounded solutions that respect cultural heritage and ecological integrity.

- **Circular Economy:** cities play a pivotal role in accelerating the shift from linear to circular models, positioning the circular economy as a key driver of urban development. This thematic cluster explores how circularity can be embedded across diverse areas of urban life—from innovative waste and resource management to green business models and local value chains. The circular economy is not only a framework for reducing environmental impact and energy consumption, but also a catalyst for urban innovation and inclusive economic growth. This cluster may also incorporate the development of resilient food systems, aligning with growing urban commitments to food justice, health equity, and access to locally produced, nutritious food.

- **Digitalization and Urban Innovation:** as cities grow more connected and complex, digitalization and innovation are becoming essential tools for improving urban governance, service delivery, and citizen engagement. This thematic cluster focuses on supporting cities in adopting smart, data-driven solutions that enhance quality of life, increase efficiency, and strengthen resilience. Core areas of focus include ethical and inclusive use of artificial intelligence, data governance, digital inclusion, and the deployment of smart infrastructure. The thematic cluster also promotes cross-cutting objectives such as equity, transparency, and performance measurement, enabling cities to harness digital tools not only for efficiency but also for inclusive, citizen-centered innovation ecosystems.

- **Affordable/Attainable Housing and Innovative Living Spaces:** this thematic cluster supports cities and regions in improving livability, social inclusion, and access to safe, secure, and affordable housing. It addresses the urgent need for stable residency and innovative housing solutions across diverse urban contexts in the EU, the United States, and Canada. Recognizing that housing is a foundation for quality of life, the thematic cluster promotes integrated approaches that combine affordability, sustainability, and design innovation. Beyond bricks and mortar, the cluster also explores the social and spatial dimensions of housing. By connecting housing with broader goals of equity, resilience, and cohesion, this thematic cluster fosters urban environments that are not only functional but inclusive and just.