

Entry Kit

DEAR CITIES

1. The brief

It's time to sit down and have a serious conversation with our cities.

For most of us, the city is the invisible backdrop to everything we do - where we work, rest, fall in love, grow up, grow old. We rarely stop to ask whether it's designed in a people-centred approach or built the way we actually want to live. This challenge is that invitation to stop and wonder.

Dear Cities, is a global open call, created by Mota-Engil in partnership with THU, that asks people from every creative discipline to imagine new ways to live, feel and experience the cities of the future - and to say it in the most personal format there is: a letter.

Because cities aren't about concrete and infrastructure: they're about the people inside them. So rather than starting from buildings and cars, we start from shaped human experiences. How will we live in the cities of the future? What new relationships will we have with urban space? How do we build cities that are more comfortable, more inclusive, more sustainable, more... human?

There are many visions for a *Dear City*. We'd like to know yours.

2. Where our ideas land

Ideas need a place to become real. **OPO City**, in Matosinhos, Porto, is an urban regeneration megaproject, conceived around a simple idea: a city should serve daily life and offer proximity over scale. Intimacy over density. Life and purpose over growth.

OPO City was the starting point and a living laboratory for the first tangible expression of Dear Cities. [Learn more.](#)

3. What we're asking for

A letter is a personal thing - a moment of reflection addressed to someone we care about. We're asking you to write one to a city: define something you care about; and propose how you'd like to see it changed, healed or imagined differently.

You don't need a finished, polished project. This is not a public procurement opportunity either.

Your submission includes:

1. Your **letter to *Dear Cities***, should contemplate your vision for a better city or a problem you want to tackle. What would you change and why does it matter? All letters will be exhibited as part of the challenge and shared with OPO City and the decision-makers shaping its future (maximum 1,500 characters).
2. **Tell us what you want to create (the medium)**
How will you bring your letter to life? The materialization can take shape as a film, installation, object, writing, interactive experience, performance, immersive storytelling, archviz, animation, or others. What medium(s) will you use and why do they fit your concept?
3. Attach a **draft** or **moodboard** (or both) to reinforce your application.

4. The six themes

To kickstart your letter, imagine improved cities through the lens of six themes:

1. Community:

What makes a space feel truly shared? Density alone doesn't create connection - cities can pack people together and still leave them isolated. Loneliness in urban environments is often less about the absence of people and more about the absence of opportunities that promote a sense of belonging. Combating loneliness takes intentional design and the promotion of much discussed "third spaces".

2. Nature:

How much room does a city leave for what it didn't build? Urban landscapes are often designed as if nature were decoration - a little mowed grass park here, a row of trees there - rather than infrastructure the city should actually depend on. Nature should be a system within a city, not an amenity.

3. Health:

What role should a city play in our wellbeing? What do health-promoting cities look like? Streets that invite walking instead of demanding a car? Buildings that let in daylight instead of blocking it out? Design that reduces isolation and prevents noise? A healthy city should promote its physical, social and environmental conditions to maximize human health.

4. Art and Culture:

How would you integrate art, creativity and cultural expression into the daily life of the city you imagined? These elements should be reframed as atmosphere rather than an isolated attraction. A city's creative pulse should be easily recognizable: you shouldn't need to visit an institution to experience them.

5. Education:

Can a city be built to let knowledge move across generations? A city that promotes continuous learning doesn't just educate its youngest residents - it keeps everyone, at every age, both a student and a source.

6. Housing and Belonging

How can housing create a sense of community for different people and ways of living? One model does not fit all. Shared spaces should invite interaction instead of isolating each household behind its own door.

7. Technology, Innovation & Mobility

A city built only for speed risks becoming a city you pass through rather than one you belong to. How can technology, innovation and increased mobility serve the people better?

8. Freedom

You're free to think outside the themes. Bring your unique vision to life through your individual lens.

5. **Prepare your Submission**

You need an active THU account to prepare a submission. Submissions are editable until the deadline. Edit your draft and save it before submitting your final work.

Your submission application consists of:

Project Title and Team Name: Find a title that conveys the message of your concept/idea.

Letter: Start your ideation process. Write a letter starting with the words "Dear Cities,"

Concept description: Summarize and clearly communicate your concept/idea. Mention the theme(s) that inspired it.

Medium(s): Clarify what medium(s) you will use and why they fit your concept.

Accomplishments: What do you expect to achieve by the end of the project?

Tools Description: List the materials, software, hardware equipment and human resources you might use to turn your idea into an output.

Required help: What are your expectations from the mentorships? What support would you expect from this project while developing your idea?

Keywords: Add tags that accurately categorize your project areas. Examples: Extended Reality (XR), Immersive technologies, Digital Photography, Mixed Media and others.

Files submission: Submit a moodboard or a supporting draft of your concept. This is the primary material the judges will look at to base their decision on. Submit only essential work to help understand your concept and execution. Keep it objective: a few strong pages that bring your concept and execution to life will always land better than an exhaustive document. Think "essential," not "extensive."

Name your file with the project title and team name so it's easy to identify (e.g., Project Title_Team Name.pdf).

Resources: Any additional resources (ex: video formats) can be included if they add value to your main deliverables. For example, if they show how far along you are in the idea's execution or if you have examples that offer further insights into your research and development. Judges will only be looking at them if they want to look for more resources. These sources should be in url format.

Accepted Formats and Resolutions: Submission Material: PDF file, up to 10 MB. Representative Images: Recommended resolution - 1920px on longest edge, in landscape/ horizontal format, 72 dpi. Allowed formats: jpeg, png. Max 10 MB Video: URL (from an external platform such as youtube or vimeo) Sound & Music: URL (from an external platform such as soundcloud, etc).

Make sure you meet these specs when preparing your work to ensure eligibility.

FAQs

Who can apply?

Anyone 18 or older by the submission deadline, applying individually or as part of a team of up to four people. There's no upper age limit. Companies, organizations, institutions or other legal entities cannot apply - only individuals and informal teams.

Can I submit more than one project?

Yes, but only one of your projects can ultimately be selected as a finalist.

Is there a cost to enter?

No, participation is completely free.

What do I need to submit?

Before submitting, read the challenge's *entry kit* carefully. Your submission will need three parts: 1) a letter starting with "Dear Cities," sharing your vision for the perfect city; 2) a description of how you'd turn that letter into a creative work (film, installation, object, writing, performance, immersive experience, etc.); 3) A moodboard or draft of the concept.

If I'm applying as a team, does everyone need an account?

One member - the Team Representative - submits the project and is responsible for managing the entry and inviting the rest of the team to join the platform until the submission deadline.

How are winners chosen?

By a panel of experts appointed by THU and Mota-Engil - there's no public vote. The process runs in three stages: 1) Shortlisting - up to 10 teams are selected from all eligible submissions; 2) Pitch Day (Top 10 → Top 5) - shortlisted teams pitch online; up to 5 advance to the Mentorship Phase; 3) Final Pitch (Top 5 → 3 Winners) - after the mentorship phase, the five teams pitch their developed projects and three winners are selected.

Who owns the rights to my idea?

You do. Being selected as a finalist or winner does not transfer ownership of your project - intellectual property stays entirely with the creators. THU and Mota-Engil can use submitted materials (descriptions, images, videos) for communication and promotional purposes related to the challenge, with credit given to the teams.

Are there eligible expenses covered by the project?

Selected TOP 3 teams may have access to a dedicated project budget covering some eligible expenses directly related to their project - such as software licenses, within capped limits. Each expense is reviewed individually on a case-by-case basis. Travel expenses are not eligible. Reimbursement requires valid invoices and prior approval. Further details on the budget and eligible expenses will be shared with selected teams.