HS2 Accelerator 8.0
Applicant Guidance Document

Thank you for your interest in the HS2 Accelerator 8.0.

This guidance document is designed to help you complete your application succesfully. It explains what we are looking for, how we will use your responses, and tips to strengthen your submission.

General Information

1. Please read this guidance document in full before completing your application.
2. Only the information provided in the application form will be considered during assessment.
3. Applications are automatically saved and can be edited at any time before submission.
4. Multiple team members can contribute by using the **Add Collaborators** feature.
5. The deadline for submission is **31 October 2025, 23:59 (UK time)**. Late applications will not be accepted.
6. Applications will be assessed from **3 November 2025** with outcomes communicated on **10 November 2025**.
7. All information provided must be true, accurate, and not misleading. Material misrepresentation may result in disqualification from the competition.
8. By submitting, you confirm you have read and understood the programme Terms & Conditions.

Eligibility

Before starting your application, please ensure you meet the following criteria:

- You are a small or medium-sized enterprise (SME) based or headquartered in the UK or Europe.

- You are a data, software, or digital technology business.

- You are revenue-generating (pre-revenue companies will not be eligible).

- You have at least 12 months of financial runway.

- You have experience delivering projects involving complex datasets.

- You can commit time and resources to participate fully in all programme stages.

Competition Stages

This is a competitive innovation programme. Participation in this programme does not constitute a procurement process, and selection does not necessarily guarantee a commercial contract.

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From an estimated pool of 60–70 applicants, **32–36 SMEs will be shortlisted** to join the Explore stage (4 weeks) to refine their ideas into formal proposals. Following assessment, **8–12 finalists will progress** to the Demonstrate stage (4 weeks) to develop proof-of-concept demonstrators using real-world data. After showcasing at a Demonstrator Day and further evaluation, **4–6 winners will advance** to the Accelerate stage (12 weeks) to receive bespoke business support, including, but not limited to:

- Trial design support
- Marketing, PR & communications support
- Business case support
- Impact assessment support
- Entrepreneur & leadership expertise
- Market & sector-specific expertise

1. <u>Explore</u>

32 – 36 shortlisted applicants to progress

Purpose: Understand the challenges, identify opportunities, and explore potential solutions.

- Participate in the **Challenge Exploration Day** to:
    - Deep dive into the challenge themes and potential use cases.
    - Understand user requirements, operational constraints, and risks.
    - Refine your solution ideas through workshops and 1-to-1s.

- Participate in the **Challenge Exploration Roundup (Q&A)** to:
    - Learn key insights and findings from the Challenge Exploration Day.
    - Clarify any outstanding questions with challenge sponsors and technical experts.
    - Gather additional context to strengthen your proposal.

- Present your proposal to the programme judging panel for assessment.

2. <u>Demonstrate</u>

8 – 12 finalists to progress

Purpose: Develop, prototype, and demonstrate solutions with real-world data and operational context.

- Awarded £5,000 funding to develop your demonstrator whilst work closely with mentors, challenge sponsors, data owners, and user groups.

- Showcase at a Demonstrator Day to your HS2 challenge sponsors and government stakeholders, getting direct feedback from experts.

- Receive feedback on non-technical aspects, such as commercial viability and operational readiness.

- Complete a final interview with the programme judging panel.

3. Accelerate

4 – 6 winners to progress

Purpose: Receive further wraparound business support to scale your demonstrator into a pilot project with HS2.

- Complete an onboarding / welcome session to capture your needs and baseline data.

- Receive bespoke support and mentorship tailored to your solution and business, including:

    o Pilot project development, and support with data access if required

    o Business model and pricing strategy development

    o Pitching and stakeholder engagement support

- Take part in fortnightly check-ins with programme team to monitor progress and receive feedback.

- Capture the impact of your solution, helping to demonstrate the value you bring and inform next steps to be awarded a funded pilot project (up to £50,000).

- Celebrate your success at a final industry event, sharing learnings and demonstrating impact to HS2, government, supply chain and the wider industry.

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (ED&I)

At Connected Places Catapult, we believe that diverse teams build better solutions. We are committed to creating an inclusive programme where founders and innovators from all backgrounds have equal opportunity to succeed.

We actively encourage applications from underrepresented groups in tech and innovation, including women, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, neurodiverse individuals, and founders from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

While ED&I is not a formal selection criterion, we will ask participating companies to support our ED&I goals by completing a short, anonymous survey. This helps us measure representation and make future programmes more accessible and inclusive. By fostering a culture of openness, collaboration, and respect, we want the HS2 Accelerator ecosystem to be a space where all voices are heard and all ideas can thrive.

Application Guidance

Section 1: Overview

Purpose: To help us understand who you are, what you do, and how your business is positioned.

- Clearly articulate your mission statement (why your company exists in less than 30 words).

- Accurately reflect your stage of maturity.

- Provide a realistic picture of your business model.

- If consultancy-led, outline if you have an ambition to transition to a more a productised or scalable offering.

Section 2: Due Diligence

Purpose: To ensure your business is eligible, compliant, and capable of working with CPC, HS2 and other public partners.

- Demonstrate clear compliance with key legal and ethical frameworks (anti-slavery, anti-bribery, Modern Slavery Act 2015).

- Show a commitment to Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (ED&I).

- Provide disclosure of past participation in Connected Places Catapult programmes and how you've progressed since.

Section 3: Financial Due Diligence

Purpose: To confirm financial health and ensure you can engage without disruption.

- Indicate a sustainable financial position (12-month runway minimum).

- Provide transparency around your current funding stage and total investment raised to date, providing details where appropriate.

- Where applicable, explain upcoming fundraising plans and intended use of funds.

- Confirm whether you are registered with any existing procurement frameworks (e.g. G-Cloud).

Important: We recognise that the financial information you provide is sensitive. All financial data submitted as part of your application will be treated as strictly confidential. It will be accessed only by the Connected Places Catapult programme team and appointed assessors for the purposes of evaluating your application. We will not disclose, share, or publish your financial data in any way that could identify your company without your prior written consent.

Section 4: Team Capability & Credibility

Purpose: To evaluate whether you have the technical, commercial, and operational capability to deliver value in the programme.

- Provide a clear initial hypothesis/idea that responds to the HS2 challenge themes.

- Specify what datasets you would need and why.

- Demonstrate prior experience working with infrastructure, construction, or rail (or transferable sectors).

- Show evidence of having delivered projects using complex datasets with measurable benefits.

- Highlight AI / data capabilities your team uses (tick-box, plus examples).

- Provide evidence of IP assets (if any).

- Be candid about your team's growth areas and strategy for strengthening them.

Tip: Examples are powerful. If you can, provide short case studies with problem, solution, and measurable outcomes.

Section 5: Commitment & Ambition

Purpose: To assess your motivation and long-term fit with HS2.

- Clearly explain why you want to participate and how it aligns with your growth strategy.

- Define what success beyond the programme looks like (e.g. pilots, procurement readiness, partnerships).

- Identify what kind of support you need (procurement, PR, investment readiness, etc).

Tip: Be authentic. Generic responses ("we want to grow") won't stand out. Tailor your answer to HS2 and the opportunities this programme offers for your business.

Top Tips for Applicants

- **Be clear and concise** – keep answers focused and avoid unnecessary jargon.

- **Show evidence** – use specific examples of past projects, clients, or measurable outcomes.

- **Demonstrate relevance** – explain how your solution or expertise directly addresses the challenge themes.

- **Highlight capability** – showcase your team's technical, commercial, and sector experience.

- **Be realistic** – set out only what you can commit to and achieve within the programme timeframe.

- **Show ambition** – outline how participating in the programme could create long-term value for your company and for HS2.

Mistakes to Avoid

To give your application the best chance of success, please avoid the following:

- **Vague or generic responses** — be specific, evidence-based, and show how your solution directly addresses HS2's challenges.

- **Not hitting word limits** — we have limited our open questions to responses of 50, 100 and 200 words to improve accessibility for applicants and assessors, so please ensure that you reach the word limit for each question.

- **Overstating capability** — honesty is valued. Be clear about current maturity, limitations, and what support you need to grow.

- **Lack of evidence or examples** — where possible, include real case studies, measurable outcomes, or proof of delivery.

- **Not tailoring to the programme** — avoid generic "copy-paste" submissions. It is extremely beneficial to show awareness of HS2's context and why your solution is relevant.

- **Incomplete applications** — unanswered questions or missing information may weaken your chances of progressing.

- **Late submission** — applications submitted after the deadline cannot be accepted.

Dates & Deadlines

Please note the dates and deadlines for the competition below. These are indicative timings, and we will adhere to this schedule as best we can. The closing date for applications is fixed and will be 23:59 (GMT) on 31 October 2025. We will begin assessing applications from 3 November 2025. Applications submitted after the deadline will not be considered. Extensions will not be granted under any circumstances.

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Applications Open	-	23 September 2025
Guidance Webinar	Event - Virtual	9 October 2025
Applications Close	-	31 October 2025
Notification to Shortlisted Applicants	Email	10 November 2025
Challenge Exploration Day	Event – In Person	20 November 2025
Challenge Exploration Roundup (Q&A)	Event - Virtual	25 November 2025
Stage 1 (Explore) Assessments	Interview - Virtual	8 December – 11 December 2025
Notification to Finalists	Email	15 December 2025
Agreement Deadline	-	12 January 2026
Demonstrator Day	Event – In Person	12 February 2026
Stage 2 (Demonstrate) Assessments	Interview - Virtual	16 February – 17 February 2026
Notification to Winners	Email	19 February 2026
Stage 3 (Accelerate) Onboarding Session	Event - Virtual	24 February 2026
Programme Offboarding Event	Event – In Person	14 May 2026

Contact Details

If you have any questions about the HS2 Accelerator 8.0 programme or need support with your application, please get in touch with Jasmine Pollock, Programme Lead.

We recommend reviewing this guidance pack thoroughly before reaching out, as most answers can be found here. For technical issues with the application platform, please contact support@simplydo.co.uk.