

Innovation support programme ZĪLE (ACORN)

Valmiera

📍 Latvia
👤 COUNTRY

👤 24 420
👤 POPULATION

👤 Around 66 000 EUR
👤 FUNDING

👤 Valmiera County Municipality funding
👤 FUNDING SOURCES

👤 Business support initiatives
👤 TOPIC OF PRACTICE

👤 Valmiera Development Agency,
Valmiera County Municipality
👤 PRACTICE OWNER



**VALMIERAS
NOVADS.**



👤 The innovation support programme ZĪLE (ACORN) provides support to existing companies, start-ups, and freelancers to encourage innovations, development, export, the creation of new jobs, public and private partnerships, and social entrepreneurship. The gaps in the innovation support ecosystem and the need for more innovations and innovative companies in the region inspired Valmiera Development Agency to develop a business support programme ZILE together with the local municipality and other stakeholders.

👤 ABOUT 👤

- 👤 1. Superlow bureaucracy, supereasy to implement;
- 2. Training sessions available for participants;
- 3. Consultancy during both application and implementation phases;
- 4. Advance payment and superquick reimbursement of funds after the final report;
- 5. Wide communication and PR activity promoting businesses, including videos.

👤 STRONG POINTS 👤

- 👤 1. Municipality - financial support to the business development policy initiative;
- 2. Business support organisations;
- 3. Business clubs and associations;
- 4. Higher and vocational education institutions;
- 5. Media.

👤 KEY STAKEHOLDERS 👤

- 👤 1. Rather low level of business skills and knowledge of start-ups and freelancers.
- 2. Supplier issues that participants sometimes face.
- 3. Uncertainty about the annual budget for the programme, as it depends on municipality council decision.

👤 CHALLENGES 👤

- 👤 In 8 years, the program has:
 - 81 business projects supported.
 - 68 new jobs were created.
 - 37 innovative products, services or prototypes.
 - 230 000 EUR total fund allocated to the companies throughout the years.

The program had strong economic impact (SMEs, products, etc), social impacts (skills, local life) and environmental impacts (circularity & awareness).

👤 RESULTS AND IMPACTS 👤

- 👤 The city is attracting foreign direct investment and building business infrastructure, companies have access to support tools and programmes, talent is attracted and educated, a prototyping co-creation workshop is available, and young people engage in career development support activities and develop their business skills. Although various broad national and European Union financial instruments are available in Latvia, regional SMEs are not always ready to engage in them due to various bureaucratic obstacles that can reduce the emergence of new innovations, new companies and jobs in the region. Seeing this gap, the Valmiera Development Agency created the innovation support programme ZĪLE (ACORN), which is funded by the municipality of Valmiera and has become an integral part of the local business support and innovation ecosystem.

👤 CITY STRATEGY 👤

- 👤 1. Programme administration processes made very simple and very quick.
- 2. Simplification of implementation and reporting system and processes.
- 3. Pitching the projects face-to-face allowing us to truly see the motivation of the programme participants.
- 4. Encouraging networking among participants which fosters mutual issue solving and mentoring.
- 5. Including stakeholders in evaluation committee which significantly increases their involvement and interest in the programme.

👤 ENABLING CONDITIONS 👤

- 👤 1. Engage early-on your local entrepreneurs and residents to make sure you answer their needs
- 2. ...and closely cooperate with your local ecosystem. You won't succeed without them.
- 3. Conduct a funding opportunities scan early on.
- 4. Include an effective monitoring and evaluation system to monitor progress, evaluate impact and make necessary adjustments.

👤 TRANSFER TIPS 👤