EDIH CTU

EDIH Czech Technical University in Prague

EDIH CTU

European Digital Innovation Hub in the Czech Republic in the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML)

GRANT AGREEMENT NUMBER: 101083359

Deliverable D3.5

Lessons Learned from the 1st Round of Open Calls

(version 3 – update 31 December 2025)

Co-funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union NextGenerationEU

CZECH RECOVERY PLAN

Inspire and make the Czech AI-driven Industry

Project title	EDIH Czech Technical University in Prague (EDIH CTU)
Grant Agreement number	101083359
Funding scheme	Digital Europe Programme (DIGITAL) Call: DIGITAL-2021-EDIH-01 Topic: DIGITAL-2021-EDIH-INITIAL-01
Type of action	DIGITAL Simple Grants
Project duration	1 January 2023 – 31 December 2025 (36 months)
Project coordinator name	CTU - CESKE VYSOKE UCENI TECHNICKE V PRAZE
Deliverable number and title	**D3.4 – Lessons Learned from the 1st Round of Open Calls**
WP contributing to the deliverable	WP3 Test before Invest
Deliverable type	R - Report
Dissemination level	Public
Due submission date	30 April 2024, updated version V3 31 December 2025
Actual submission date	30 April 2024, updated version V3 31 December 2025
Deliverable Lead	David Pesek
Contributor(s)	Mikulas Cizmar
	Jan Sedivy
	Vaclav Hlavac
Internal reviewer(s)	
Final approval	Barbora Zochova, Mikulas Cizmar

Status
This deliverable is subject to final acceptance by the EDIH Chairman and Business Development and Technology Transfer Manager.
This deliverable was approved on 29 April 2024, updated version V3 31 December 2025.

Disclaimer
Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the national granting authority, i.e. the Ministry of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

History of changes		
When	**Who**	**Comments**
January 2025	David Pesek	Revision and update of the whole text.
December 2025	David Pesek	Revision and update of the whole text.

Confidentiality	
Does this report contain **confidential** information?	Yes ☐ No☒
Is the report **restricted** to a specific group?	Yes ☐ No ☒

Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AI	Artificial Intelligence
CTU	Czech Technical University in Prague
EDIH	European Digital Innovation Hub
ML	Machine Learning
MoIT	Ministry of Industry and Trade
PSO	Public Sector Organization
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise
TRL	Technology Readiness Level

Executive Summary

Purpose of the Document

The Deliverable *D3.5 Lessons Learned from the First Round of Open Calls* serves to describe and communicate the key insights, outcomes, and observations from the EDIH CTU project implementation, mainly to evaluate internally the third round of open calls active from January 2025 to December 2025, and where relevant, also the whole period of EDIH CTU 1.0 (2023–2025). It is intended to provide a comprehensive overview of what worked well, what challenges were encountered, and what improvements can be made for future initiatives in the next project.

Scope of the Evaluation

The scope of this evaluation encompasses the first round of open calls of the EDIH CTU project, from the initial assumptions and planning stages to the final execution and feedback collection. The evaluation also addresses the project's alignment with its overarching vision and identifies any discrepancies between expected and actual outcomes.

Methodology

The data gathering and analysis for this document involved a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. We collected data through direct observations, data and document reports, ensuring a complete view of the open call progress. This was supplemented by structured interviews with project team members, service providers, and clients to gain deeper insights into their experiences. The analysis focused on identifying patterns, inconsistencies, and areas for improvement, providing a solid foundation for the conclusions and recommendations outlined in this document.

1. Introduction

1.1 Overview of the document contents

Yes. We had assumptions. Yes. We met reality. Once again.

This document discusses the details we have learned. Some lessons learned and recommendations stemming from the previous rounds of the open calls have already been mentioned in Deliverable *D3.4 Evaluation Report of Open Calls* (submitted in March 2024), Chapters 6 and 7 specifically.

1.2 Assumptions

Initially, we believed that certain actions would yield expected results. Our primary assumptions were:

- We would publish an adapted library of services according to the Grant Agreement and according to the “lessons learned” from previous open calls rounds, expecting high demand and long queues of prospective business clients who would actively search for our services.
- Such a library was updated, most of our technologies have already been incorporated in it.

1.3 Reality

Contrary to our assumptions, the actual outcomes revealed significant gaps and challenges:

- There was still no queue at the testbed.
- A shortage of service providers due as not all faculties that committed to the project actively offered their services.
- The development and research services took considerably more time (and money) than anticipated, as customizing existing algorithms for clients required much more extensive work than planned.
- There was a misunderstanding of the project's vision, which focused on supporting SMEs and public services rather than research activities as such.
- Continued overestimation of AI capabilities by all parties slowed down the creation of functional projects.
- The consortium's internal resources were stretched even thiner.
- Clients still had vague ideas about their requirements, rarely arriving with well-prepared data, clear expectations, or desired outputs. This led to extended consultative preparatory phases with these clients.
- The actual work hours required for each service were still significantly higher than estimated, resulting in fewer delivered services, though we maintained quality within the given budget.
- There was higher demand for chatbots and less for industrial technologies.

1.4 Strategy

To achieve our vision, we implemented the following strategies:

- Improved Visibility.
- Knowledge-sharing events, conferences, workshops, and information campaigns helped increase visibility.
- Creating service group queues.

- Feedback processes (see also *D4.3 Service portfolio evaluation and optimization*, Chapter 4 specifically).
- Enhanced external and internal feedback mechanisms.
- Improvement in the quality of documents at the open call's entry point.

1.5 Action Plan

To address the challenges and implement our strategy, we outlined the following action steps:

- Select services for showcasing.
- Produce video tutorials for providers, including step-by-step guides on how to approach the process.
- Launch a marketing campaign with live interviews featuring existing projects and showcasing in the press.
- Review drafts of documents prepared for internal service providers and for clients.
- Update the website.
- Set up better web traffic measurement.
- Revise internal capacity among service providers with direct contacts.
- Assess the cost-performance ratio and measure value for money to ensure services meet expected standards.

2. Project Context and Objectives

2.1 Background Information on the Project

The project was initiated to create a comprehensive ecosystem for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and public service organization (PSOs) to access and leverage advanced technologies, particularly in the fields of artificial intelligence and machine learning. The project's foundation rests on the idea of providing SMEs and PSOs with access to technology, expertise, and resources that would help the SMEs and PSOs to decide on investments in technologies in the “test before invest” activity pillar, thus encouraging overall innovation and competitiveness.

2.2 Objectives for each Round

During the last round, the primary objective was to sustain a strong framework for delivering services to SMEs and public sector entities. This involved forming, organizing, and formalizing further partnerships with various faculties and institutions of the Czech Technical University in Prague (CTU). A key focus was on ensuring the seamless integration of project activities to support project outcomes towards business clients.

2.3 Expected Outcomes

The expected outcomes for the last round included a functional catalogue with a defined range of services, and a clear roadmap for future expansion. Outcomes comprised the establishment of key partnerships, update of a service catalogue, and the successful launch of last round projects with SMEs and PSOs.

3. Implementation of the First round of open calls

3.1 Description of the Open Call Process

The first round of open call was designed to attract SMEs and PSOs interested in accessing advanced technology services and expertise following up on the success of the previous rounds. The process involved public announcements, detailed documentation of available services, and clear guidelines for participation (all published on the www.edihctu.eu website, open call announcements were also published on the EDIH CTU LinkedIN).

3.2 Stakeholder Involvement and Response

Stakeholder involvement was a critical component of the open call process. The project's consortium engaged with key partners, including academic institutions and industry associations, to promote the open calls and encourage participation.

Workshops, webinars, and informational sessions were conducted to inform stakeholders about the project's goals and the benefits of participating in the open calls. The response from stakeholders was generally positive, with many expressing interests in the collaborative opportunities offered by the project. This engagement helped to establish a strong foundation for future interactions and partnerships.

3.3 Overview of Submissions Received

The last round of open calls attracted a diverse range of submissions from SMEs and PSOs across various industries. The proposals varied in scope and complexity, reflecting the wide array of needs and interests among the participants. Most submissions focused on artificial intelligence and machine learning applications, with a noticeable demand for chatbot technology. Other submissions explored industrial technologies and process automation.

4. Lessons Learned

4.1 Challenges Encountered and How They Were Addressed

The project faced several challenges during the last round of open calls, requiring adaptive solutions and flexibility. Some lessons learned and recommendations stemming from the previous rounds of the open call have already been mentioned in Deliverable *D3.4 Evaluation Report of Open Calls* (submitted in March 2024), in Chapters 6 and 7 specifically.

One significant challenge was the continuing shortage of service providers, as not all CTU faculties that had committed to the project were still able to actively participate. This issue was addressed by encouraging CTU faculties to engage using good practice examples and by creating a special working group aimed at proactively identifying and addressing administrative obstacles.

4.2 Successes and Strengths of the Project During This Period

Despite the challenges, the project achieved several notable successes. The engagement with stakeholders was a key strength, with positive responses from both SMEs and PSOs sides. The project's focus on knowledge sharing through workshops and informational sessions significantly contributed to its success, enhancing visibility and attracting quality submissions.

5. Next Steps

5.1 Objectives for the Last Period

For the last project period, the project has set several key short-term objectives to build on the momentum from the last round of open calls.

One critical objective was to focus on better explanation of the range of services offered, addressing the service portfolio. Additionally, the project aimed to increase stakeholder engagement through targeted outreach and collaboration with project stakeholders, namely industry associations. This included hosting more knowledge-sharing events and workshops to foster deeper connections with SMEs and public sector entities.

5.2 Mitigation Strategy in Detail

The following table lists the identified challenges and their respective applied mitigation strategies.

ID	Challenge	Mitigation
1	A shortage of service providers arose because not all faculties that committed to the project joined.	Open a series of calls with faculty representatives to regularly update commitments and responsibilities to ensure participation.
2	Service descriptions were insufficient and lacked clarity.	An update set of service descriptions was developed to improve clarity in communication between clients and service providers.
3	The implementation services took considerably more working hours than anticipated, as customizing existing algorithms for clients required extensive work based on different client context.	We decided to develop a modular approach to customization, allowing for reusability of existing components. We will also enhance pre-project planning to better scope the efforts required.
4	Overestimation of AI capabilities by all parties slowed down the creation of functional service delivery.	We will lower the threshold by implementing an AI Transformation Academy focused on explaining where in industry AI/ML based technologies CAN be used and where these technologies are VIABLE and FEASIBLE.
5	Clients often had vague ideas about their requirements, rarely arriving with well-prepared data, clear expectations, or desired outputs. This led to extended consultative preparatory phases with these clients.	We will intensify the communications and consultation phase and explain facts about AI deployment through AI Transformation Academy focused on explaining where in industry AI/ML based technologies CAN be used and where these technologies are VIABLE and FEASIBLE.
6	The actual work hours required for each service were significantly higher than estimated in the original project plan, resulting in fewer delivered services, though we maintained quality and quantity within the given budget.	This led us to choose a different methodology for the next call that will better deliver a proper estimation of our services in terms of project size (in hours).

6. Conclusion

The last round of open call has highlighted several critical areas for improvement while simultaneously affirming the project's core strategy and its long-term objectives. The insights and lessons learned gained from this phase are invaluable, guiding necessary adjustments to not only meet but surpass the expectations of all stakeholders involved.

Looking ahead, these lessons will steer the next phase of the project towards more effective and impactful implementation, thus increasing its contribution to technological advancement and regional economic competitiveness. This dedication to continual learning and adaptation is crucial for the enduring success of the project, which aims to empower SMEs and PSOs with technological solutions.