

PIONEER Festivals

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Executive Summary

This **PIONEER Festival guidelines** aims at describing a PIONEER Festival and the framework for its organisation within the PIONEER Alliance. The purpose, strategic value, core principles, framework elements, requirements, risk management and best practices observed among PIONEER Alliance institutions.

PIONEER Festival is a recurring communication and/or dissemination instrument, community-building and platform designed to showcase achievements of the PIONEER Alliance and project itself, strengthen European values, and demonstrate societal impact (mainly in SDG 11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities, and Smart City topics). It is both a visibility event and a strategic communication tool.

PIONEER Festivals are organized yearly by partner institutions. The events take place partially in English and partially in local languages. The Festivals are strongly recommended to be linked to wider event at partner institutions (e.g. International Staff Weeks), **to promote European exchange, collaboration, and shared values. These events serve as a platform for aligning strategic vision and activities, presenting project outcomes, sharing knowledge, raising awareness, and for engaging associated partners, students, staff, and stakeholders from both local and international communities.**

Through an inclusive and participatory format, **the Festivals encourage collaboration across the PIONEER Knowledge Hub and Open Campus** while recognising outstanding contributions to the Alliance's mission and strategic orientations. Beyond celebrating project achievements, **the initiative strengthens the sense of European identity, unity, and cooperation among diverse communities.** The Festivals also highlight the PIONEER Alliance's broader commitment to societal impact and sustainability, particularly in relation to SDG 11.

Overall, a PIONEER Festival acts as a key visibility and engagement instrument supporting the long-term communication, dissemination and impact goals of the PIONEER Alliance.

As the **PIONEER Alliance** evolves, these guidelines should be regarded **as a flexible and evolving framework**, subject to periodic review and refinement based on accumulated experience, stakeholder feedback, emerging opportunities, and the diverse needs and contexts of partner institutions.



I. Framework for Organisation of Festivals within the PIONEER Alliance

A PIONEER Festival is a recurring **communication** and/or **dissemination instrument**, **community-building** and platform designed to align strategic vision, showcase **achievements** of the project and the PIONEER Alliance, strengthen **European values**, and demonstrate **societal impact** (mainly in SDG 11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities, and Smart City topics).

1. Strategic value

It serves:

- To celebrate the successes of the PIONEER Alliance, its outreach efforts, and its societal impact aligned with its vision and strategic orientations.
- To showcase advancements, share insights, and promote European values.
- As a communication and dissemination platform for exhibiting project results
- As a platform for networking and inclusion of internal and external stakeholder's partners, ecosystem members).
- As a platform for active engagement, co-creation and community building across the PIONEER Alliance.
- To strengthen visibility of the PIONEER Alliance and provide evidence of its outreach activities.
- To foster a sense of Europeanism, unity, and shared values across diverse institutional communities and to foster a sense of belonging to the different national and local PIONEER communities.
- To reinforce commitment to SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities.

The Festival functions as:

- a communication and/or dissemination instrument (visibility as a European University)
- an engagement platform (internal + external)
- an internal community builder among PIONEER members
- recognition mechanism about main contributions of partners to PIONEER Alliance

2. Engagement Strategy

A PIONEER Festival is not only a dissemination and communication activity, but also an opportunity to strengthen ownership, belonging among its consortium partners' living and visible community, and long-term institutional involvement within partner universities and their ecosystems.



PIONEER Festivals' target groups (such as students, academic and non-academic staff, university leadership, researchers, associated partners, ecosystem members, etc) should act as active contributors and ambassadors of PIONEER Alliance values, activities and impact. The Festivals can serve as a platform for co-creation opportunities for internal communities through, e.g.: student-led workshops and sessions; volunteering opportunities; local initiatives connected to the PIONEER Alliance and Festival topics; faculty contributions; research showcase; intercultural activities, etc.

PIONEER Festivals should contribute to long-term community building across the Alliance. Institutions are encouraged to nominate a PIONEER Ambassador at their institutions, faculties and/or departments to support sustainable visibility, outreach and continuous collaboration.

PIONEER Ambassadors may include motivated students, teachers, institutional representatives, researchers, ecosystem members or communication officers, who actively communicate about and support Festival (and PIONEER Alliance) related activities.

Ambassadorship works for both internal and external audiences.

Ambassadorship may include:

- contributing to communication and dissemination efforts (e.g. sharing success stories, testimonials, supporting social media visibility, content creation, podcasts ...)
- supporting the preparation and implementation of Festival activities
- encouraging participation of target groups (e.g. local communities, peer-to-peer engagement within institutions, external outreach to ecosystem stakeholders)

This approach aims to strengthen ownership, visibility, long-term engagement and sense of belonging across the PIONEER Alliance partners and its members, as well as to promote the core identity and strategic vision and orientations, the European values and inter-institutional collaboration.

3. Core principles

- WHY-driven communication (clear purpose before format)
- Open and inclusive participation
- Strong visibility of the PIONEER Alliance identity and strategic vision and orientations
- Flexible local implementation
- Integration with existing institutional events, where possible (i.e. International Staff Weeks and others)
- Monitoring & Evidence-based approach (for reporting and evaluation)

○ Flexibility principle

Flexibility of local implementation in regard of institutional environments and strategic communication priorities at partners' level. Strong alignment with International Staff Weeks



(preferred) or other institutional flagship events. May be organized as a stand-alone event as well.

Institutions may adapt the **format** (stand-alone event or embedded in wider event such as an International Staff Week, institutional days, career days, welcoming weeks), **scale** (local, national, international, multi-campus), **delivery modality** (face-to-face, hybrid) and **thematic focus** (SDG11, mobility, sustainability, Smart cities, European values).

4. Recommended Minimum Framework Elements

Each PIONEER Festival **is strongly recommended** to include the following core elements:

a. Alignment with Alliance Strategy

The Festival shall be clearly aligned with the PIONEER Alliance strategic orientations and objectives and SDG11 (e.g. by presentation of PIONEER Alliance project goals, results and achievements). The theme of the wider event should be clearly connected to the PIONEER Alliance and its strategic objectives.

b. Institutional Integration

The Festival is recommended to be organised in alignment with the International Staff Weeks whenever possible. It may be embedded in a wider institutional event (e.g. International Staff Week, ECO Festival, AVANS Day, Career Days, Welcoming Weeks) or organised as a stand-alone event.

The PIONEER Festival shall be implemented by all partner institutions of the Alliance. However, institutions with multiple campuses are not required to organise festival activities on every campus; implementation on at least one campus of the institution is sufficient.

c. An Open and Inclusive Event Format

The Festival is recommended to be open to internal and external stakeholders, including (students, academic and administrative staff, researchers, associated and supporting partners, ecosystem stakeholders). It should include international and local dimensions and be organised in national language(s) and at least part of the programme or communication in English (workshop, brochure, article...).

d. Visibility and Physical/Hybrid Presence

The Festival should ensure high visibility, ideally in accessible and open spaces. Physical presence is strongly encouraged (stands, booths, open spaces), complemented by online or hybrid formats where needed, and possible, for a wider outreach, accessibility and visibility. Possible delivery models (embedded in International Staff Weeks (recommended), stand-alone event, multi-campus parallel events, hybrid + webinar series ("PIONEER online layer"), roadshow format (mobile outreach)).

For attractiveness and effectiveness, it is recommended to include at least one interactive format (e.g. workshop / panel / booth / talk / live podcast).



e. Content Requirements

Each edition should include at least two of the following:

- ✓ Presentation of PIONEER Alliance goals, achievements and results
- ✓ Activities linked to thematic priorities (e.g. SDG 11, smart cities, future cities)
- ✓ Interactive formats (e.g. workshops, panels, discussions, booths, live podcast)
- ✓ Engagement opportunities for students, teachers, researchers and staff (participatory and diverse dialogue sessions)
- ✓ Recognition or celebration elements (e.g. awards, acknowledgements, certificates).

f. Communication Requirements

Communication Requirements in PIONEER Alliance are described and defined in more detail in Communication, Dissemination and Impact Plan Deliverable D8.1.

For basic framework for Festivals, the institutional communication of the event is recommended to cover:

- Before the event: promotion through institutional channels (e.g. email, website, social media, calendars, internal systems, e.g. Whaller and institutional intranets)
- During the event: visibility of the corporate identity of the PIONEER Alliance and engaging communication actions (e.g. on social media, live posting in social media, testimonials o participants, media coverage, involvement of Students' Unions)
- After the event: dissemination of outcomes (e.g. website articles, newsletters highlights and articles, short reports, follow-up actions update on the institutional website(s), social media, and/or other internal channels)

g. Evidence Collection

Process of evidence collection is described and defined in more detail in Communication, Dissemination and Impact Plan Deliverable D8.1.

In each Festival is needed to gather:

- visual and documentary evidence (photos, outputs, dissemination materials)
- evidence of dissemination (articles, posts, reports, podcasts, etc.)
- tracking of engagement and visibility of the event
- reflection on alignment with PIONEER Alliance strategic objectives and orientations, and SDG 11 focus

The recommended minimum PIONEER Festival framework elements are listed in the checklist (Part II) to facilitate event organization and enable effective monitoring of their implementation.

5. Recommendations

In this section are identified recommendations for event design and positioning, formats and activities, engagement strategy, communication approach and visibility tools (flexible implementation in regard of institutional environments).



The following elements are recommended but adaptable depending on the institutional context. They can be used as an inspiration and recommendations for the event concept, design and its organization:

- Combine learning/education offers with entertaining elements to increase attractiveness.
- Use a clear annual theme according to institutional and PIONEER Alliance priorities (e.g. SDG 11, smart cities, European values).
- Strong narrative explaining the “WHY” of PIONEER and PIONEER’s key messages identified in the Communication, Dissemination and Impact Plan.
- Gathering participant feedback and data collection through questionnaires/surveys
- Mix program elements, e.g.: workshops, panel discussions, exhibitions, live podcasts, talks, mobility sessions.
- Include “PIONEER Talks” or student-led sessions (peer-to-peer format).
- Involve students actively in presentations and stands (Student Unions, PIONEER Ambassadors).
- Engage staff from multiple institutional and organisational units, profiles and functions.
- Include colleagues from partner universities from PIONEER Alliance consortium.
- Use inspirational speakers or “celebrities” for students where relevant.
- Ensure networking opportunities, notably with Associated Partners and other relevant ecosystem stakeholders.
- Organise mobility or internationalisation sessions (for students, staff, researchers).
- Consider roadshow-style, multi-campus formats or hybrid delivery modes for wider outreach.
- Offer both physical and virtual components (e.g. webinars, live podcasts).
- Use all available communication channels (internal + external).
- Personalised invitations (email outreach, direct engagement) are highly effective.
- Provide templates (e.g. posters, flyers, visuals, brochures, give-aways, merchandising) centrally where possible.
- Prepare PIONEER-branded stands or areas/spaces
- Visual installations (e.g. posters, panels, signature walls, photos, promotional materials, brochures) produced within a Communication, Dissemination and Impact Plan for the event or series of events.

a. Good Practices (Observed Across Institutions)

Examples of the PIONEER Festival are displayed in Annex 1.

- Strong internal mobilisation of staff, units and departments significantly increases impact. Treat the Festival as an internal-to-external communication ecosystem (“inside-out approach”).
- Mobilize ecosystem stakeholders at national and local levels to promote engagement in PIONEER Alliance further activities.



- Student's involvement increases credibility and reach. Peer-to-peer storytelling (students presenting to students, e.g. workshop prepared by students; PIONEER Talks...) is highly effective. Student unions are key multipliers.
- Embedding the Festival into International Staff Weeks or Welcoming Weeks improves attendance. Combining with recruitment fairs, career days, intercultural days increases stakeholder diversity.
- Multi-campus or decentralised/hybrid formats increase accessibility. Online sessions ensure participation across dispersed institutions.
- Strong emphasis on storytelling: what PIONEER is, why it matters, and its European value. Focus on tangible benefits and real-life impact of the Alliance.

b. Development Perspective (Maturity Model)

To support long-term sustainability and ensure strong PIONEER brand consistency, the PIONEER Festival is designed as an evolving European communication system based on a "One Brand, Many Locations" principle and a shared annual narrative framework.

In the medium-term development phase of the Alliance, partners are expected to progressively move towards greater alignment of the Festival's core structure, including shared narrative framing and selected standardised communication elements, while maintaining flexibility for local implementation.

Over time, the PIONEER Festival is intended to evolve into a clearly identifiable and consistent European Alliance format, enabling cross-institutional comparability, strengthened external visibility, and a unified communication presence across all partner universities.

Work Package 8 will support this alignment process by providing communication toolkits to ensure consistent and smooth implementation across the Alliance.

6. Potential Challenges and Mitigation Measures

Limited Human Resources

Risk: insufficient staff capacity for organisation

Mitigation:

- ✓ early planning and role distribution
- ✓ involvement of multiple institutional units
- ✓ use of students' support structures

Low Student Engagement

Risk: difficulty reaching students

Mitigation:

- ✓ collaboration with Student Unions
- ✓ peer-to-peer formats
- ✓ integration with existing student events
- ✓ attractive thematic content (involve „celebrities“ for students...)
- ✓ allocate specific time and program components for students to participate



Financial Constraints

Risk: limited budget for event organisation

Mitigation:

- ✓ integration into existing institutional events
- ✓ use of low-cost formats (stands, workshops, online sessions)
- ✓ shared resources across PIONEER Alliance partners

Visibility and Awareness Challenges

Risk: insufficient awareness of PIONEER Alliance

Mitigation:

- ✓ multi-channel communication strategy
- ✓ continuous messaging before, during, after event
- ✓ strong branding and visual identity respecting PIONEER Alliance graphic identity
- ✓ clear objectives and messages to communicate
- ✓ clarify the target-groups upfront and plan differentiated communication actions
- ✓ communication on PIONEER Alliance throughout the year

Multi-Campus / Decentralised Complexity

Risk: coordination across locations

Mitigation:

- ✓ hybrid model (physical + online)
- ✓ parallel sessions across campuses
- ✓ central coordination with local execution

Monitoring and Evaluation Difficulties

Risk: lack of evidence-based and impact measurement

Mitigation:

- ✓ structured feedback collection tools
- ✓ participation tracking (registration, certificates, open badges)
- ✓ qualitative and quantitative evaluation tools designed and applied in specific moments to the participants to increase replies
- ✓ standardised questions adaptable to partner institutions to allow comparability and cross-institutional analysis of results



II. Checklist

7. Checklist for a PIONEER Festival

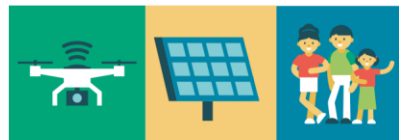
A Festival can be recognised as a PIONEER Festival if it meets the following mandatory requirements:

Mandatory Requirements:

- ✓ Clear link and strategic alignment with the objectives of the PIONEER Alliance
- ✓ Alignment with SDG 11 and its related priorities
- ✓ The event is organised, co-organise, or officially endorsed by at least one PIONEER partners institution.
- ✓ Open access for both internal and external stakeholders
- ✓ Student and/or staff participation in specific parts of the programme
- ✓ Physical or hybrid delivery format
- ✓ Presentation of PIONEER Alliance activities, results, achievement, goals
- ✓ At least one interactive component (e.g. workshop, panel discussion, exhibition booth, live podcast, co- creation activity)
- ✓ Promotion of European values and the European dimension throughout the event
- ✓ Pre-event communication and promotional activities
- ✓ Post-event dissemination activities and follow-up actions
- ✓ Collection of evidence and supporting materials (e.g.: communication materials, photographs, agenda to be shared with WP8)
- ✓ Compliance with the PIONEER Alliance Corporate Identity of PIONEER Alliance and comply with EU visibility and communication requirements

Recommended Elements:

- Well defined thematic focus link to the festival objectives
- Annual (changing) thematic focus reflecting current priorities of the Alliance or host institution
- Visibility and engagement activities (e.g. On the institutional social media) during the event
- Collection of participant feedback standardised and locally adapted evaluation forms (e.g.: common survey for all PIONEER Festivals)
- Basic impact assessment and reflection on the event outcomes
- Involvement of multiple PIONEER partners institutions (e.g. To panel discussions, live podcasts....)
- Participation of external stakeholders (e.g. Municipalities, industry representatives, citizens....)
- Inclusion of international and intercultural elements within the programme



Annexes

1. Annex 1

Annex 1: Examples of PIONEER Festivals

The following examples showcase how PIONEER Festivals have been implemented across Alliance institutions and include links to social media coverage, articles, and visual materials for inspiration and reference.

University of Žilina

PIONEER Festival at UNIZA - PIONEER alliance

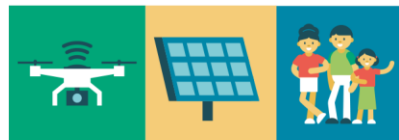
Festival at UNIZA in 2026 instagram reel



Università Iuav Venezia

Pioneer Festival at Iuav in the frame of the International Staff Week: [link](#) (2025 Edition)





Bern University of Applied Sciences:

PIONEER Festival
2026 came to campus,
[link click here](#)

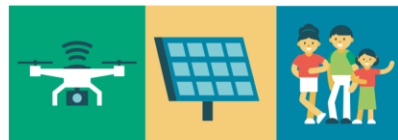


Université Gustave Eiffel

Our 2026 PIONEER Festival took place within a broader UNI EIFFEL event called the Eco-Festival. We held a PIONEER booth where we presented PIONEER and its partners and invited participants to respond to a quiz which would tell them where they should do a hypothetical PIONEER Mobility. We were able to keep track of the number of people who 'attended' our Festival thanks to the number of responses we received to the quiz.

LinkedIn article link available, [click here.](#)





TH Köln

First PIONEER Festival at TH Köln: Info Fair, Erasmus Mobilities, Workshops on COIL and Challenge-Based Education

[Click here](#)

[LinkedIn post](#)



Iscte University Institute of Lisbon

PIONEER Festival related events throughout 2025

16.01.2025 – Blended event to the overall Iscte community

Target-audience/participants: Iscte students and staff (academic and non-academic); ~200 total presences (~130 online)

Objective: Communication to the Iscte community about the PIONEER objectives, structure and key aims.



07.07.2025 - PIONEER Alliance in the Iscte International Week

Target-audience/participants: 16 people (12 female, 4 male)

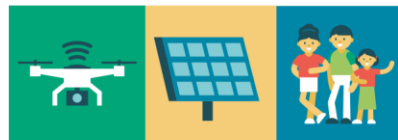
Objective: Communication about PIONEER, its objectives, aims and partners, to the participants of Iscte International Week

26.11.2025 – 1 year of PIONEER at Iscte - Blended event to the overall Iscte community

Target-audience/participants: Iscte students and staff (academic and non-academic); ~100 total presences (~60 online) – *in presence* (24 female, 15 male)

Objective: Dissemination and communication of PIONEER initial results





15-16.11.2025 - 1st Edition of the Student Network of the Alliances (REA);

Target-audience/participants: Iscte and students from various Portuguese Higher Education institutions involved in the European University Alliances; ~60 people (54 students; > 6 guests) – *in presence students* (21 female, 33 male)

Objective: Participants engaged in training sessions, round tables and debates dedicated to pedagogical innovation, student involvement in alliance governance, inclusion, and the impact and future of European Higher Education.



High level participation: Vice-Rector of Iscte for Internationalisation and the PIONEER European Alliance; President of the National Council for Pedagogical Innovation in Higher Education; Director of the Erasmus+ National Agency for Education and Training; Coordinator of FOR.U.E.PT – Forum of European Universities in Portugal; Vice-Rector of the University of Lisbon; President of the Academic Forum for Information and External Representation (FAIRe); President of the Lisbon Academic Federation (FAL)

