

SustainX supports SMEs to improve digital and sustainable innovation readiness through training, advisory support and interregional collaboration. Our aim is to connect regional ecosystems and help SMEs move towards investment-ready projects.



SustainX Best Practice One-Pager | May 2026

Best practice overview

North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) is one of Europe's strongest industrial and innovation ecosystems, combining advanced manufacturing, startup support structures and strong research capacity. This guide highlights collaboration opportunities for European organisations and SMEs based on ecosystem insights identified through SustainX activities and the Learning Journey in Germany.

The opportunity (North Rhine-Westphalia)

North Rhine-Westphalia offers:

1. Strong Industry 4.0 and advanced manufacturing ecosystem, supported by innovation clusters and research organisations.
2. Mature startup and scale-up support structures connecting SMEs with innovation hubs, accelerators and investors.
3. Access to testing, demonstration and pilot environments supporting technology validation and SME experimentation.
4. Strong collaboration culture between industry, academia and public stakeholders.
5. Opportunities for collaboration in sustainability, digital transformation, AI and smart production systems.

Why this may be useful for EDIHs & EEN nodes



This is what you can use:

- A practical overview of collaboration areas for SMEs and ecosystem actors (Industry 4.0 / AI / sustainability / advanced manufacturing / ESG).
- Examples of how mature innovation ecosystems support SME innovation through clusters, startup hubs and testing infrastructures.
- Inspiration for ecosystem collaboration, matchmaking discussions and interregional partnerships.
- Talking points for identifying potential partners and European funding opportunities.

Contact Points for SustainX SMEs investment regions

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