Digital Europe Programme (DIGITAL)

Call for proposals

Advanced Digital Skills

(DIGITAL-2024-ADVANCED-DIGITAL-07-KEYCAPACITY)

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EUROPEAN HEALTH AND DIGITAL EXECUTIVE AGENCY (HaDEA)

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CALL FOR PROPOSALS

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0. Introduction

This is a call for proposals for EU **action grants** in the field of advanced digital skills under the **Digital Europe Programme (DIGITAL)**.

The regulatory framework for this EU Funding Programme is set out in:

- − Regulation 2018/1046 (EU Financial Regulation)
- − the basic act (Digital Europe Regulation 2021/694[1]).

The call is launched in accordance with the 2023/2024 Work Programme[2] and will be managed by the **European Health and Digital Executive Agency (HaDEA)** ('Agency').

The call covers the following **topics**:

- **DIGITAL-2024-ADVANCED-DIGITAL-07-KEYCAPACITY-Specialised Education Programmes in Key Capacity Areas**

We invite you to read the **call documentation** carefully, and in particular this Call Document, the Model Grant Agreement, the EU Funding & Tenders Portal Online Manual and the EU Grants AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement.

These documents provide clarifications and answers to questions you may have when preparing your application:

- − the Call Document outlines the:

    - − background, objectives, scope, outcomes and deliverables, KPIs to measure outcomes and deliverables, targeted stakeholders, type of action and funding rate and specific topic conditions (sections 1 and 2)

    - − timetable and available budget (sections 3 and 4)

    - − admissibility and eligibility conditions (including mandatory documents; sections 5 and 6)

    - − criteria for financial and operational capacity and exclusion (section 7)

    - − evaluation and award procedure (section 8)

    - − award criteria (section 9)

    - − legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements (section 10)

    - − how to submit an application (section 11).

- − the Online Manual outlines the:

    - − procedures to register and submit proposals online via the EU Funding & Tenders Portal ('Portal')

    - − recommendations for the preparation of the application.

- − the AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement contains:

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[1] Regulation (EU) 2021/694 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2021 establishing the Digital Europe Programme (OJ L 166, 11.5.2021, p. 1).

[2] Commission Implementing Decision C/2023/1862 of 24.03.2023 concerning the adoption of the multiannual work programme for 2023 - 2024 and the financing decision for the implementation of the Digital Europe Programme.

      – detailed annotations on all the provisions in the Grant Agreement you will have to sign in order to obtain the grant *(including cost eligibility, payment schedule, accessory obligations, etc)*.

You are also encouraged to visit the Digital Skills and Jobs Platform[3] to consult the list of projects funded previously.

1. Background

As set out in the Digital Decade Communication, the European way to a digitalised economy and society is anchored in the empowerment of its citizens and businesses, ensuring the security and resilience of its digital supply chains.

In the context of global competition for brains, there is a particular need to recruit more **ICT specialists** in Europe to fulfil the needs of industrial ecosystems relying heavily on **cutting edge-technologies.** Furthermore, innovations and breakthroughs in different digital areas will further unleash a wave of increased demand in the area of **advanced digital skills**. In addition to the significant shortage of ICT specialists, there is also a high need to equip **sector specialists** (e.g. in health, agriculture, etc.) **with advanced digital skills**. The lack of advanced digital skills is also a significant obstacle hindering the harnessing of advanced digital technologies in the **green transition** and sustaining the EU's competitiveness in a carbon-neutral economy.

Only with increased efforts can the EU's ambitious Digital Decade targets of the **Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030[4]** be achieved, including the target that 20 million **ICT experts** will be employed in the EU by 2030, with more **ICT graduates** and a better **gender balance**.

The topic of this call aims at supporting the **excellence of EU higher education** to build up **specialised education programmes** and self-standing modules in the area of advanced digital skills with the goal to improve the capacity to nurture and attract digital talents, while fostering an educational ecosystem that will help drive innovation and digital breakthroughs.

2. Objectives — Scope — Outcomes and deliverables — KPIs to measure outcomes and deliverables — Targeted stakeholders — Type of action and funding rate — Specific topic conditions

DIGITAL-2024-ADVANCED-DIGITAL-07-KEYCAPACITY- Specialised Education Programmes in Key Capacity Areas

Objectives

The objective of the call for this topic is to support excellence in higher education institutions, making them world leaders in training the digital specialists of the future and to increase the capacity of the educational offer in the area of advanced digital skills. This should lead to the development of dynamic digital educational ecosystems where higher education institutions as well as innovative partners from industry and research work together to attract and retain the best talents worldwide.

Actions[5] funded under this topic will contribute to the target of 20 million ICT specialists in the EU by 2030, as set in the Digital Decade Policy Programme. These actions will also contribute to closing the digital skills gap, as currently, the EU has a significant and systemic gap between market needs and what is offered in terms of skills related to advanced digital technologies. Gains from major breakthroughs in

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digital technologies cannot materialise if there are not enough people to develop, deploy and use those technologies and their related applications. Evidence from the Structured Dialogue on digital education and skills with Member States shows that a majority of Member States expressed concerns about the shortage of ICT specialists.[6] Even in Member States that are digital frontrunners, there is a persistent shortage of people able to develop and deploy key digital technologies.[7] There is also a significant increase in the demand for professionals combining sectoral knowledge with digital skills enabling the use of digital solutions for specific business cases. This is, for example, the case of employees in the manufacturing sector able to use extended reality (XR) tools to repair engines remotely or professionals in green transition industries who are increasingly relying on advanced digital technologies in the development of renewable energy or clean and smart mobility solutions.

Scope

The primary objective of this topic is to support the design and delivery of higher education programme(s) (hereafter programmes) at ISCED levels 6 (Bachelor's or equivalent level), 7 (Master's or equivalent level) or 8 (doctoral or equivalent level) leading to a degree and to develop related self-standing modules (online, hybrid or in-person) leading to a certification. These programme(s) and module(s) need to be co-designed jointly between higher education institutions and industry as well as research partners and other partners in the consortium (if applicable). The choice of the type of programme(s) and self-standing module(s), as well as the precise curricula and the modalities (e.g. bachelor, master or doctoral programme; single or joint degree; academic or professional programme, etc.) is left to the consortium to determine. The programme(s) are to be delivered and awarded by higher education institutions and can additionally be delivered and awarded by Vocational Education and Training (VET) institutions (if part of the consortium). The self-standing module(s) can be delivered and awarded by any training provider part of the consortium. For both programme(s) and self-standing module(s), consortia are highly encouraged to include practice-oriented components (e.g. acquisition of practical experience in a company/organisation, visits of industry facilities or research organisations, etc.).

Proposals under this topic must address **the design and delivery of one** of the following types of programmes:

1. Type 1: Programme(s) to build up advanced digital skills in one of the following key digital areas:

    a. Virtual worlds
    b. Edge computing
    c. Quantum computing[8]
    d. Photonics
    e. Robotics and automatization

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[6] SWD(2023) 205 final: COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT accompanying the documents: Proposal for a Council Recommendation on the key enabling factors for successful digital education and training and Proposal for a Council Recommendation on improving the provision of digital skills in education and training {COM(2023) 205 final}.

[7] For example, over 70% of enterprises looking for ICT specialists in the Netherlands, Finland and Luxembourg found it extremely difficult to recruit ICT specialists. DESI 2022, available at: https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/digital-economy-and-society-index-desi-2022

[8] For proposals in quantum, it is encouraged to make reference to the competence framework on quantum technologies and its update (Update for the European Competence Framework for Quantum Technologies: Version 2.0 | Quantum Flagship (qt.eu).

2. Type 2.1: Interdisciplinary programme(s), targeting at the acquisition of advanced green digital skills related to specific technologies such as AI, data analytics, extended reality, robotics, cloud computing, internet of things and machine learning in the following specific sectors related to the green transition:

   f. Agriculture
   g. Transport
   h. Renewable energy
   i. Waste management

   Type 2.2: Interdisciplinary programme(s), targeting at the acquisition of advanced digital skills for:

   j. Government and public sector

Consortia can deliver more than one programme leading to a degree (irrespectively if they choose type 1 or 2) in the selected digital area or strategic sector (a.-j.) and are required to additionally develop self-standing modules leading to a certification.

Consortia can additionally deliver conversion programme(s) for students graduated from a bachelor's programme from non-ICT fields to access specialised master's programmes.

The proposals should **clearly identify the type of programme: type 1 the digital area (a-e.) or type 2 strategic sector (f-j.)** as the main focus of their programme(s) and self-standing modules. It is expected to fund at least the highest-ranking proposal from each above listed key digital area and strategic sector, provided that all thresholds are attained and within the limits of the budget available for this topic.

All programmes should also address learning outcomes related to societal challenges of today, e.g. Sustainable Development Goals and facilitate understanding and uptake of ethical principles for trustworthy technologies. Proposals are also encouraged to include in the designed programme(s) or self-standing module(s) dedicated interdisciplinary courses from other relevant academic disciplines, in particular from the social sciences and humanities addressing specific challenges and opportunities related to the use of advanced digital technologies.

Additionally, designed programme(s) in the domains of virtual worlds, edge computing, and robotics and automatization (a., b., and e.) and interdisciplinary programme(s) targeting the acquisition of advanced digital skills for government and public sector (j.) or self-standing module(s) related to those fields should integrate courses on the nature, development, technical and economic integration and use of open source software, as well as hardware (only for b and e).

Each participating higher education institution (minimum 3; see section Targeted stakeholders) needs to offer and deliver the programme to a minimum of 25 students per programme cycle. In this respect, delivering a joint master is not a requirement of this call topic. At least one full cycle of the programme should be delivered and at least one second cycle of the programme should start during the duration of the project (48 months). This results in a minimum of at least 150 students enrolled in the programme(s) during the duration of the project (min. 3 institutions, min. 25 students per programme cycle, min. 2 cycles). The awarded projects should aim at training at least 150 additional students (participants) through self-standing modules delivered by consortium members during the duration of the project. High priority will be given to consortia that have high ambitions in terms of the number of students trained and successfully completing the programme(s) and module(s) as well as delivering excellent programmes and modules.

Projects funded under this topic will be requested to collaborate with the Coordination and support action (CSA) selected by the call topic DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05-SPECIAL-PROGEDU[9]. This CSA will provide different support and collaboration activities to the projects selected under this topic. Moreover, projects funded under this call topic will also be requested to collaborate with the Digital Skills and Jobs Platform[10] to promote their outputs (programme(s), self-standing modules and other) via the platform's communication activities and by including descriptive information in its training repository.

Projects funded under this topic are further encouraged to build complementarities with other actions of this pillar as well as with actions on technology deployment supported by other pillars of the Digital Europe Programme and strengthen complementarities with Erasmus+, European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIHs), European Universities Alliances, the Deep Tech Talent Initiative, the Large-Scale Partnerships under the Pact for Skills as well as the Centres of Vocation Excellence (COVE).

Additionally, projects funded under this topic will be requested to collect data from the participants of the programme(s) and self-standing module(s) related to the performance indicators set by the Digital Europe Programme[11], namely Indicator 1 (Persons who have received training to acquire advanced digital skills) and 3 (People reporting improved employment situation after the end of the training supported by the Programme), if feasible within the duration of the projects, for Specific Objective 4: Promote advanced digital skills to address the shortage of digital experts, particularly in key technological areas[12].

Proposals can request a contribution of up to EUR 10 million as a lump sum grant, with a duration of up to 48 months, with a co-financing rate of 50%. Consequently, this does not preclude submission and selection of proposals with different duration or for other amounts.

The proposed project(s) must address **at least objective 1** and <u>one or more</u> of **objectives 2-4**:

1. Design and delivery of programme(s) and self-standing module(s) that provide students with the necessary theoretical and practical advanced digital skills and knowledge to design, deploy and use current and future generation of digital technologies and applications;

2. Attracting qualified teaching staff and students;

3. Upgrading digital solutions, equipment and infrastructure, with a special focus on interoperability of IT systems across participating higher education institutions;

4. Establishing structural and sustainable partnerships between the members of the consortium.

The proposals are encouraged to provide details in line with the below points for each award criterion.

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[9] EU Funding & Tenders Portal (europa.eu)
[10] https://digital-skills-jobs.europa.eu/en
[11] https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/performance-and-reporting/programme-performance-statements/digital-europe-programme-performance_en#programme-in-a-nutshell
[12] Further information can be found here by downloading the Programme statement: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/performance-and-reporting/programme-performance-statements/digital-europe-programme-performance_en#archived-versions-from-previous-years

Proposals are highly encouraged to cover the following points explicitly under the RELEVANCE criteria:

- Explicitly list which of the objectives above are fully covered and which are partially or not covered by the proposal (at least two objectives must be fully covered, among one of them is objective 1).

- Briefly explain the main activities covered by each chosen objective.

- Explain how the programme(s) and self-standing module(s) address(es) current and future labour market needs and will contribute to train either ICT specialists or users of advanced digital technology in the selected sector.

- Explain how the programme(s) and self-standing module(s) are designed in order to take into consideration all relevant new developments and trends regarding digital technologies and labour market needs.

- Explain what the added value of the programme(s) is compared to existing offers.

- Explain how the programme(s) and self-standing module(s) contribute to closing the advanced digital skills gap.

- Explain how students will be educated to design, develop or use digital technologies and applications in line with the EU values and ethics throughout the curriculum.

Proposals are highly encouraged to cover the following points explicitly under the IMPLEMENTATION criteria:

- **For Objective 1 – addressing skills needs (relevant for all)**

  - Describe the details of the awarded degree(s) (e.g. single, double or joint degree) and the type of certification awarded for self-standing module(s).

  - Briefly describe how the programme(s) and self-standing module(s) will be co-designed jointly between members of the consortium (in particular between higher education institutions and industry partners).

  - Broadly explain how the programme(s) and self-standing module(s) will be structured, including describing the main content of the proposed curricula, as well as a description of the practice-oriented components.

  - Explain, if such initiative is taken up by the proposal, the role of VET providers in design, delivering and awarding programme(s) and self-standing module(s).

- **For Objective 2 (relevant only if addressed by the proposal) – Attracting qualified teaching staff and students**

  - *2.1   Teaching staff*

    - Explain how the programme(s) and self-standing module(s) will offer lectures and seminars by highly qualified experts in digital technologies, both from the public and private sector.

    - Explain what incentives will be provided to attract highly qualified and renowned teaching and research staff (including from third countries)

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to contribute to the delivery of the programme(s) and self-standing module(s).

- Explain what steps will be taken to attract female teaching staff and experts to participate in the design and deployment of programme(s) and self-standing module(s), and initiatives offered.

- Explain what activities are considered to encourage the mobility of the teaching staff across the institutions participating in the consortium (in particular between the industry partners and participating higher education institutions).

2.2 *Students*

- Explain how students who hold the nationality of an EU and/or of another Digital Europe Programme eligible country will be financially supported (e.g. via scholarships, fee waivers or others) to participate in the programme(s) or self-standing module(s). Explain how students from countries with whom the European Commission has ongoing international cooperation related to digital topics (e.g. digital partnerships, trade and technology councils, policy dialogues, Talent Growth Task Force)[13] will be financially supported (e.g. via scholarships, fee waivers or others) to participate in the programme(s) or self-standing module(s) and how gender conversion will be promoted. Explain how the financial support will ensure diversity in terms of gender, socio-economic background, etc. This support can take the form of Financial Support to Third Parties.

- Explain, if such initiative is taken up by the proposal, how students will be financially supported to acquire practical experience either with members of the consortium or with companies and organisations outside the consortium (e.g. via internships or short-term job placements). This support can take the form of Financial Support to Third Parties.

- Explain how student mobility between higher education institutions is encouraged and how complementarity and coordination with other mobility programmes (in particular Erasmus+) is achieved.

For Objective 3 (relevant only if addressed by the proposal) – Upgrading digital solutions, equipment and infrastructure, with a special focus on interoperability of IT systems across participating Higher education institutions

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[13] The European Union currently has four digital partnerships, with Japan, Korea, Singapore and Canada Digital Partnerships | Shaping Europe's digital future (europa.eu). A Trade and Technology Council (TTC) is established between the EU and the United States (US) and the EU and India. The EU and the US additionally launched a Talent for Growth Task Force that supports training from the US and the EU. The EU cooperates with many countries, international organisations and multilateral fora to represent Europe's interests and actively promote the benefits of the EU's digital strategy. International cooperations, unlocking the benefits of digital transformation around the world, are conducted with countries from Eastern Europe, Western Balkans, Mediterranean, Africa and so forth (Foreign policy | Shaping Europe's digital future (europa.eu).

- Explain if and how digital solutions, equipment and infrastructure will be purchased/leased to ensure the programme(s) and self-standing module(s) have the necessary facilities to deliver excellence[14].

- Explain how higher education institutions of the consortium, at least 2, will be equipped for interoperability, e.g. with transnational (virtual) campuses, shared equipment and libraries of learning content.

- Explain how the project will explore the innovative use of digital tools and solutions to support the functioning of the education programme(s) and self-standing module(s), such as the cross-border verification of educational credentials piloted by the European Blockchain Service Infrastructure or other solutions.

- **For Objective 4 (relevant only if addressed by the proposal) – Establishing structural and sustainable partnerships**

  - Explain how the partnerships between the members of the consortium will be sustainable over time and will achieve a high degree of integration.

Proposals are highly encouraged to cover the following points explicitly under the IMPACT criteria:

Outreach

- Describe the communication and dissemination activities particularly targeting high school pupils, bachelor's/master's students as well as the workforce in the digital areas and specific sectors, to raise awareness regarding the programme(s) and self-standing module(s).

- Describe how information of the self-standing module(s) is disseminated to the interested general public.

- Describe how information about the programme(s) and self-standing module(s) are published on online platforms that provide information on available education offers, including programmes' details (e.g. name, description, list of courses, length, field of study in which the course is taught, etc.) and institution details (e.g. name of the university, country).

- Explain how the programme(s) and self-standing module(s) will be showcased and promoted on the Digital Skills and Jobs Platform[15].

Outcomes and deliverables

Proposals selected for funding, depending on their chosen objectives' coverage, will be required to demonstrate by the end of the action that:

- The programme(s) are offered and taught to students enrolled in all higher education institutions participating in the action. The self-standing module(s) are delivered by higher education institutions and/or other training providers participating in the action (relevant for all proposals);

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14   Depreciation cost is eligible.
15   https://digital-skills-jobs.europa.eu/en

- Support (financial or other) has been provided to students in order to take part in the programme(s) or in job placements/internships (relevant if objective 2 is addressed);

- Technical equipment/digital tools have been upgraded for the delivery of the programme(s) and self-standing module(s) (relevant if objective 3 is addressed);

- Structural partnerships have been established among the members of the consortium (relevant if objective 4 is addressed);

- A sustainability strategy has been developed and agreed by the consortium for enabling the continuity of the programme(s) and self-standing module(s) after the funded project's lifetime (relevant for all proposals);

- The programme(s) and self-standing module(s) are promoted (via communication and dissemination activities) and information is available on the Digital Skills and Jobs Platform (relevant for all proposals).

KPIs to measure outcomes and deliverables

The KPIs to measure outcomes and deliverables should be provided by the consortium depending on their chosen coverage of objectives of this topic. KPIs should address the proposal's covered points under the 'Scope' section. Priority will be given to consortia who provide realistic, relevant, qualitative and quantitative KPIs that best reflect the proposal's main outcomes and deliverables.

The following KPIs should be included as a minimum:

- Number of higher education institutions in the consortium offering the designed programme(s);

- Number of higher education institutions and/or other training providers in the consortium offering the designed self- standing module(s);

- Number of students, enrolled in the programme(s) and self-standing module(s), including numbers of female students as well as students from lower socio-economic backgrounds;

- Completion rate of students who have successfully completed the programme(s) (targeting the minimum of 80%) and self-standing module(s) in the time foreseen by the action;

- Number of students benefitting from financial or other support during the duration of the project (e.g. scholarships, internships), if applicable;

- Number of newly recruited qualified and renowned teaching and research staff, if applicable;

- Number of collaborations between higher education institutions and industry, if applicable (e.g. number of seminars/lectures held by industry experts, etc.).

Targeted stakeholders

The participating consortium members should demonstrate complementary roles in the proposal and demonstrate an outstanding track record in their respective fields.

The consortium is highly recommended to include <u>at least three degree awarding higher education institutions from three different eligible countries</u> which are part of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE)[16]. Higher education institutions established in other eligible countries which are not part of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education can also be included in the consortium. In this case, the consortium has to prove that the specific higher education institution is recognised by the competent national authority and offers full study programmes leading to higher education degrees and recognised diplomas at tertiary education qualifications levels.

In addition to this, it is highly recommended for consortia to include <u>a minimum of two industry partners whose headquarters are located in two different eligible countries</u>. The consortium is also encouraged to particularly involve small and medium enterprises (SMEs) as well as start-ups.

The consortium is also encouraged to include <u>at least one additional independent research organisation/hub or competence/excellence centre</u>. In the proposal, the consortium is encouraged to demonstrate the relevance of this partner(s) by referring to aspects such as the points below, but not limited to them:

- The number of patent applications in the areas identified within the scope of this call topic (section 2);
- The number of papers accepted in conferences and published in scientific journals on the above-mentioned areas;
- The number of relevant national or EU funded projects (H2020, etc.).

To facilitate the participation of Vocational Education and Training (VET) institutions in the design and delivery of advanced digital skills training opportunities and to support flexible learning pathways, it is encouraged to seek cooperation with VET providers, preferably as partners in the consortium. The proposals should outline how the proposed project will exploit the unique insights of VET into the labour market needs and its links with the industry to support the design and delivery of the programme(s) and self-standing module(s).

Particular attention should be given to:

- Ensuring inclusivity in Europe and help widening the specialised education offer in all Member States with a special focus on those Member States that score low in terms of advanced digital skills levels, according to the Digital Economy and Society Index;

- Inclusion of industry partners, in particular start-ups and SMEs, but also other public or private entities that can be instrumental for the delivery of the actions requested by this call topic;

- Close collaboration with other stakeholders that provide technical expertise and experimentation and testing facilities (e.g. with European Digital Innovation Hubs) is highly encouraged.

Please note that higher education institutions already delivering similar programmes as the ones addressed by the proposal addressing this call topic can participate. However, they must explain the added value of the newly designed programme(s) and self-standing module(s) compared to the existing education offer delivered in the latest academic years.

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[16] https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/document/higher-education-institutions-holding-an-eche-2021-2027

European Universities alliances selected under the Erasmus+ programme and other alliances of higher education institutions are also encouraged to participate, provided that they include the necessary partners requested and they fulfil all the objectives outlined in this section. Participation of alliances involving VET institutions such as COVEs[17] is also encouraged.

Type of action and funding rate

Lump Sum Grants — 50% funding rate

For more information on Digital Europe types of action, *see Annex 1*.

Specific topic conditions

- For this topic, multi-beneficiary applications are mandatory and specific conditions for the consortium composition apply *(see section 6)*

- For this topic, the following reimbursement option for equipment costs applies: depreciation cost only *(see section 10).* The lump sum for equipment costs should be calculated with depreciation costs in the detailed budget table.

- For this topic, financial support to third parties is allowed *(see section 10)*

- The following parts of the award criteria in section 9 are exceptionally NOT applicable for this topic:

    - extent to which the project would reinforce and secure the digital technology supply chain in the Union*

    - extent to which the proposal can overcome financial obstacles such as the lack of market finance*

3. Available budget

The available call budget is **EUR 55 000 000**.

Specific budget information per topic can be found in the table below:

Topic	Topic budget
DIGITAL-2024-ADVANCED-DIGITAL-07-KEYCAPACITY-Specialised Education Programmes in Key Capacity Areas	**EUR 55 000 000**

We reserve the right not to award all available funds or to redistribute them between the call priorities, depending on the proposals received and the results of the evaluation.

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[17] Centres of Vocational Excellence - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission (europa.eu)

4. Timetable and deadlines

Timetable and deadlines (indicative)	
Call opening:	**04 July 2024**
<u>Deadline for submission:</u>	**<u>21 November 2024 – 17:00:00 CET (Brussels)</u>**
Evaluation:	**November 2024-January 2025**
Information on evaluation results:	**February 2025**
GA signature:	**February-August 2025**

5. Admissibility and documents

Proposals must be submitted before the **call deadline** *(see timetable section 4)*.

Proposals must be submitted **electronically** via the Funding & Tenders Portal Electronic Submission System (accessible via the Topic page in the <u>Search Funding & Tenders</u> section. Paper submissions are NOT possible.

Proposals (including annexes and supporting documents) must be submitted using the forms provided *inside* the Submission System (⚠ NOT the documents available on the Topic page — they are only for information).

Proposals must be **complete** and contain all the requested information and all required annexes and supporting documents:

   – Application Form Part A — contains administrative information about the participants (future coordinator, beneficiaries and affiliated entities) and the summarised budget for the project *(to be filled in directly online)*

   – Application Form Part B — contains the technical description of the project *(to be downloaded from the Portal Submission System, completed and then assembled and re-uploaded)*

   – **mandatory annexes and supporting documents** *(templates available to be downloaded from the Portal Submission System, completed, assembled and re-uploaded)*:

     – detailed budget table/calculator: **applicable**

     – CVs of core project team: not applicable

     – activity reports of last year: not applicable

     – list of previous projects (key projects for the last 4 years) *(template available in Part B):* **applicable**

     – ownership control declarations: not applicable

Please be aware that since the detailed budget table serves as the basis for fixing the lump sums for the grants (and since lump sums must be reliable proxies for the actual costs of a project), the costs you include MUST comply with the basic eligibility conditions for EU actual cost grants *(see AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement, art 6)*. This is particularly important for purchases and subcontracting, which must comply with best value for money (or if appropriate the lowest price) and be free of any conflict of interests. If the budget table contains ineligible costs, the grant may be reduced (even later on during the project implementation or after their end).

At proposal submission, you will have to confirm that you have the **mandate to act** for all applicants. Moreover you will have to confirm that the information in the application is correct and complete and that the participants comply with the conditions for receiving EU funding (especially eligibility, financial and operational capacity, exclusion, etc). Before signing the grant, each beneficiary and affiliated entity will have to confirm this again by signing a declaration of honour (DoH). Proposals without full support will be rejected.

Your application must be **readable**, **accessible and printable**.

Proposals are limited to maximum **70 pages** (Part B). Evaluators will not consider any additional pages.

You may be asked at a later stage for further documents *(for legal entity validation, financial capacity check, bank account validation, etc)*.

For more information about the submission process (including IT aspects), consult the Online Manual.

6. Eligibility

Applications will only be considered eligible if their content corresponds wholly (or at least in part) to the topic description for which they are submitted.

Eligible participants (eligible countries)

In order to be eligible, the applicants (beneficiaries and affiliated entities) must:

- be legal entities (public or private bodies)
- be established in one of the eligible countries, i.e.:
    - EU Member States (including overseas countries and territories (OCTs))
    - non-EU countries:
        - listed EEA countries and countries associated to the Digital Europe Programme (list of participating countries)

Beneficiaries and affiliated entities must register in the Participant Register — before submitting the proposal — and will have to be validated by the Central Validation Service (REA Validation). For the validation, they will be requested to upload documents showing legal status and origin.

Other entities may participate in other consortium roles, such as associated partners, subcontractors, third parties giving in-kind contributions, etc *(see section 13)*.

Specific cases

Natural persons — Natural persons are NOT eligible (with the exception of self-employed persons, i.e. sole traders, where the company does not have legal personality separate from that of the natural person)

International organisations — International organisations are not eligible, unless they are International organisations of European Interest within the meaning of Article 2 of the Digital Europe Regulation (i.e. international organisations the majority of whose members are Member States or whose headquarters are in a Member State).

Entities without legal personality — Entities which do not have legal personality under their national law may exceptionally participate, provided that their representatives have the capacity to undertake legal obligations on their behalf, and offer guarantees for the protection of the EU financial interests equivalent to that offered by legal persons[18].

EU bodies — EU bodies (with the exception of the European Commission Joint Research Centre) can NOT be part of the consortium.

Associations and interest groupings — Entities composed of members may participate as 'sole beneficiaries' or 'beneficiaries without legal personality'[19]. ⚠ Please note that if the action will be implemented by the members, they should also participate (either as beneficiaries or as affiliated entities, otherwise their costs will NOT be eligible).

Countries currently negotiating association agreements — Beneficiaries from countries with ongoing negotiations for participating in the programme *(see list of participating countries above)* may participate in the call and can sign grants if the negotiations are concluded before grant signature and if the association covers the call (i.e. is retroactive and covers both the part of the programme and the year when the call was launched).

Following the Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/2506, as of 16th December 2022, no legal commitments (including the grant agreement itself as well as subcontracts, purchase contracts, financial support to third parties etc.) can be signed with Hungarian public interest trusts established under Hungarian Act IX of 2021 or any entity they maintain.

Affected entities may continue to apply to calls for proposals. However, in case the Council measures are not lifted, such entities are not eligible to participate in any funded role (beneficiaries, affiliated entities, subcontractors, recipients of financial support to third parties). In this case, co-applicants will be invited to remove or replace that entity and/or to change its status into associated partner. Tasks and budget may be redistributed accordingly.

EU restrictive measures — Special rules apply for certain entities *(e.g. entities subject to EU restrictive measures under Article 29 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) and Article 215 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU)[20])*. Such entities are not eligible to participate in any capacity, including as beneficiaries, affiliated entities, associated partners, subcontractors or recipients of financial support to third parties (if any).

For more information, *see Rules for Legal Entity Validation, LEAR Appointment and Financial Capacity Assessment*.

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[18] See Article 197(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation 2018/1046.
[19] For the definitions, see Articles 187(2) and 197(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation 2018/1046.
[20] Please note that the EU Official Journal contains the official list and, in case of conflict, its content prevails over that of the EU Sanctions Map.

Consortium composition

Proposals must be submitted by:

- for topic **DIGITAL-2024-ADVANCED-DIGITAL-07-KEYCAPACITY**

a consortium composed of a minimum 6 applicants (beneficiaries; not affiliated entities) from 4 different eligible countries.

Eligible activities

Eligible activities are the ones set out in section 2 above.

Projects should take into account the results of projects supported by other EU funding programmes. The complementarities must be described in the project proposals (Part B of the Application Form).

Projects must comply with EU policy interests and priorities *(such as environment, social, security, industrial and trade policy, etc)*.

Financial support to third parties is allowed in

- **DIGITAL-2024-ADVANCED-DIGITAL-07-KEYCAPACITY**

for grants and prizes under the following conditions:

- the calls must be open, published widely and conform to EU standards concerning transparency, equal treatment, conflict of interest and confidentiality

- the calls must be published on the Funding & Tenders Portal, and on the participants' websites

- the calls must remain open for at least two months

- if call deadlines are changed this must immediately be published on the Portal and all registered applicants must be informed of the change

- the outcome of the call must be published on the participants' websites, including a description of the selected projects, award dates, project durations, and final recipient legal names and countries

- the calls must have a clear European dimension.

Financial support to third parties will be accepted in projects which use grants and prizes to support students to participate in the programme(s), self-standing modules and internships.

Your project application must clearly specify why financial support to third parties is needed, how it will be managed and provide a list of the different types of activities for which a third party may receive financial support. The proposal must also clearly describe the results to be obtained.

Security

Projects involving EU classified information must undergo security scrutiny to authorise funding and may be made subject to specific security rules (detailed in a security aspects letter (SAL) which is annexed to the Grant Agreement).

These rules (governed by Decision [2015/444](#)[21] and its implementing rules and/or national rules) provide for instance that:

— projects involving information classified TRES SECRET UE/EU TOP SECRET (or equivalent) can NOT be funded

— classified information must be marked in accordance with the applicable security instructions in the SAL

— information with classification levels CONFIDENTIEL UE/EU CONFIDENTIAL or above (and RESTREINT UE/ EU RESTRICTED, if required by national rules) may be:

— created or accessed only on premises with facility security clearance (FSC) from the competent national security authority (NSA), in accordance with the national rules

— handled only in a secured area accredited by the competent NSA

— accessed and handled only by persons with valid personnel security clearance (PSC) and a need-to-know

— at the end of the grant, the classified information must either be returned or continue to be protected in accordance with the applicable rules

— action tasks involving EU classified information (EUCI) may be subcontracted only with prior written approval from the granting authority and only to entities established in an EU Member State or in a non-EU country with a security of information agreement with the EU (or an administrative arrangement with the Commission)

— disclosure of EUCI to third parties is subject to prior written approval from the granting authority.

Please note that, depending on the type of activity, facility security clearance may have to be provided before grant signature. The granting authority will assess the need for clearance in each case and will establish their delivery date during grant preparation. Please note that in no circumstances can we sign any grant agreement until at least one of the beneficiaries in a consortium has facility security clearance.

Further security recommendations may be added to the Grant Agreement in the form of security deliverables *(e.g. create security advisory group, limit level of detail, use fake scenario, exclude use of classified information, etc)*.

Beneficiaries must ensure that their projects are not subject to national/third-country security requirements that could affect implementation or put into question the award of the grant *(e.g. technology restrictions, national security classification, etc)*. The granting authority must be notified immediately of any potential security issues.

7. Financial and operational capacity and exclusion

Financial capacity

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[21] See Commission Decision 2015/444/EU, Euratom of 13 March 2015 on the security rules for protecting EU classified information (OJ L 72, 17.3.2015, p. 53).

Applicants must have **stable and sufficient resources** to successfully implement the projects and contribute their share. Organisations participating in several projects must have sufficient capacity to implement all these projects.

The financial capacity check will be carried out on the basis of the documents you will be requested to upload in the [Participant Register](#) during grant preparation *(e.g. profit and loss account and balance sheet, business plan, audit report produced by an approved external auditor, certifying the accounts for the last closed financial year, etc)*. The analysis will be based on neutral financial indicators, but will also take into account other aspects, such as dependency on EU funding and deficit and revenue in previous years.

The check will normally be done for all beneficiaries, except:

- public bodies (entities established as public body under national law, including local, regional or national authorities) or international organisations

- if the individual requested grant amount is not more than EUR 60 000.

If needed, it may also be done for affiliated entities.

If we consider that your financial capacity is not satisfactory, we may require:

- further information

- an enhanced financial responsibility regime, i.e. joint and several responsibility for all beneficiaries or joint and several liability of affiliated entities *(see below, section 10)*

- prefinancing paid in instalments

- (one or more) prefinancing guarantees *(see below, section 10)*

or

- propose no prefinancing

- request that you are replaced or, if needed, reject the entire proposal.

For more information, *see [Rules for Legal Entity Validation, LEAR Appointment and Financial Capacity Assessment](#)*.

Operational capacity

Applicants must have the **know-how, qualifications** and **resources** to successfully implement the projects and contribute their share (including sufficient experience in projects of comparable size and nature).

This capacity will be assessed together with the 'Implementation' award criterion, on the basis of the competence and experience of the applicants and their project teams, including operational resources (human, technical and other) or, exceptionally, the measures proposed to obtain it by the time the task implementation starts.

If the evaluation of the award criterion is positive, the applicants are considered to have sufficient operational capacity.

Applicants will have to show their capacity via the following information:

- general profiles (qualifications and experiences) of the staff responsible for managing and implementing the project

- description of the consortium participants

– list of previous projects (key projects for the last 4 years; *template available in Part B*).

Additional supporting documents may be requested, if needed to confirm the operational capacity of any applicant.

Exclusion

Applicants which are subject to an **EU exclusion decision** or in one of the following **exclusion situations** that bar them from receiving EU funding can NOT participate[22]:

– bankruptcy, winding up, affairs administered by the courts, arrangement with creditors, suspended business activities or other similar procedures (including procedures for persons with unlimited liability for the applicant's debts)

– in breach of social security or tax obligations (including if done by persons with unlimited liability for the applicant's debts)

– guilty of grave professional misconduct[23] (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)

– committed fraud, corruption, links to a criminal organisation, money laundering, terrorism-related crimes (including terrorism financing), child labour or human trafficking (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant

– shown significant deficiencies in complying with main obligations under an EU procurement contract, grant agreement, prize, expert contract, or similar (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)

– guilty of irregularities within the meaning of Article 1(2) of EU Regulation [2988/95](including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)

– created under a different jurisdiction with the intent to circumvent fiscal, social or other legal obligations in the country of origin or created another entity with this purpose (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant).

Applicants will also be rejected if it turns out that[24]:

– during the award procedure they misrepresented information required as a condition for participating or failed to supply that information

– they were previously involved in the preparation of the call and this entails a distortion of competition that cannot be remedied otherwise (conflict of interest).

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[22] See Articles 136 and 141 of EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).
[23] Professional misconduct includes: violation of ethical standards of the profession, wrongful conduct with impact on professional credibility, false declarations/misrepresentation of information, participation in a cartel or other agreement distorting competition, violation of IPR, attempting to influence decision-making processes or obtain confidential information from public authorities to gain advantage.
[24] See Article 141 EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

8. Evaluation and award procedure

The proposals will have to follow the **standard submission and evaluation procedure** (one-stage submission + one-step evaluation).

An **evaluation committee** (assisted by independent outside experts) will assess all applications. Proposals will first be checked for formal requirements (admissibility, and eligibility, *see sections 5 and 6*). Proposals found admissible and eligible will be evaluated against the operational capacity and award criteria *(see sections 7 and 9)* and then ranked according to their scores.

For proposals with the same score (within a topic or budget envelope) a **priority order** will be determined according to the following approach:

> Successively for every group of *ex aequo* proposals, starting with the highest scored group, and continuing in descending order:

1) Proposals focusing on a theme that is not otherwise covered by higher ranked proposals will be considered to have the highest priority.

2) The ex aequo proposals within the same topic will be prioritised according to the scores they have been awarded for the award criterion 'Relevance'. When these scores are equal, priority will be based on their scores for the criterion 'Impact'. When these scores are equal, priority will be based on their scores for the criterion 'Implementation'.

3) If this does not allow to determine the priority, a further prioritisation can be done by considering the overall proposal portfolio and the creation of positive synergies between proposals, or other factors related to the objectives of the call. These factors will be documented in the panel report.

4) After that, the remainder of the available call budget will be used to fund projects across the different topics in order to ensure a balanced spread of the geographical and thematic coverage and while respecting to the maximum possible extent the order of merit based on the evaluation of the award criteria.

All proposals will be informed about the evaluation result (**evaluation result letter**). Successful proposals will be invited for grant preparation; the other ones will be put on the reserve list or rejected.

Proposals under topic **DIGITAL-2024-ADVANCED-DIGITAL-07-KEYCAPACITY** contribute to the objectives of Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP). As such, eligible proposals that exceed the evaluation thresholds will be awarded a STEP Seal. The STEP Seal is a quality label, whose main purpose is to facilitate funding to the projects awarded the seal from private and public sources.

⚠ No commitment for funding — Invitation to grant preparation does NOT constitute a formal commitment for funding. We will still need to make various legal checks before grant award: *legal entity validation, financial capacity, exclusion check, etc*.

Grant preparation will involve a dialogue in order to fine-tune technical or financial aspects of the project and may require extra information from your side. It may also include adjustments to the proposal to address recommendations of the evaluation committee or other concerns. Compliance will be a pre-condition for signing the grant

If you believe that the evaluation procedure was flawed, you can submit a **complaint** (following the deadlines and procedures set out in the evaluation result letter). Please note that notifications which have not been opened within 10 days after sending will

be considered to have been accessed and that deadlines will be counted from opening/access *(see also Funding & Tenders Portal Terms and Conditions)*. Please also be aware that for complaints submitted electronically, there may be character limitations.

9. Award criteria

The **award criteria** for this call are as follows:

1. Relevance

- Alignment with the objectives and activities as described in section 2

- Contribution to long-term policy objectives, relevant policies and strategies, and synergies with activities at European and national level

- Extent to which the project would reinforce and secure the digital technology supply chain in the EU*****

- Extent to which the project can overcome financial obstacles such as the lack of market finance*****

2. Implementation

- Maturity of the project

- Soundness of the implementation plan and efficient use of resources

- Capacity of the applicants, and when applicable the consortium as a whole, to carry out the proposed work

3. Impact

- Extent to which the project will achieve the expected outcomes and deliverables referred to in the call for proposals and, where relevant, the plans to disseminate and communicate project achievements

- Extent to which the project will strengthen competitiveness and bring important benefits for society

- Extent to which the project addresses environmental sustainability and the European Green Deal goals, in terms of direct effects and/or in awareness of environmental effects ***.**

*May not be applicable to all topics (see specific topic conditions in section 2).

Award criteria	Minimum pass score	Maximum score
Relevance	3	5
Implementation	3	5
Impact	3	5
Overall (pass) scores	**10**	**15**

Maximum points: 15 points.

Individual thresholds per criterion: 3/5, 3/5 and 3/5 points.

Overall threshold: 10 points.

Proposals that pass the individual thresholds AND the overall threshold will be considered for funding — within the limits of the available budget (i.e. up to the budget ceiling). Other proposals will be rejected.

10. Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements

If you pass evaluation, your project will be invited for grant preparation, where you will be asked to prepare the Grant Agreement together with the EU Project Officer.

This Grant Agreement will set the framework for your grant and its terms and conditions, in particular concerning deliverables, reporting and payments.

The Model Grant Agreement that will be used (and all other relevant templates and guidance documents) can be found on Portal Reference Documents.

Starting date and project duration

The project starting date and duration will be fixed in the Grant Agreement *(Data Sheet, point 1)*. Normally the starting date will be after grant signature. A retroactive starting date can be granted exceptionally for duly justified reasons but never earlier than the proposal submission date.

Project duration:

- 48 months for topic **DIGITAL-2024-ADVANCED-DIGITAL-07-KEYCAPACITY**

Extensions are possible, if duly justified and through an amendment.

Milestones and deliverables

The milestones and deliverables for each project will be managed through the Portal Grant Management System and will be reflected in Annex 1 of the Grant Agreement.

The following deliverables will be mandatory for all projects:

– additional deliverable on dissemination and exploitation, to be submitted in the first six months of the project

Form of grant, funding rate and maximum grant amount

The grant parameters *(maximum grant amount, funding rate, total eligible costs, etc)* will be fixed in the Grant Agreement *(Data Sheet, point 3 and art 5)*.

Project budget (maximum grant amount):

- up to EUR 10 M per project for topic **DIGITAL-2024-ADVANCED-DIGITAL-07-KEYCAPACITY**

The grant awarded may be lower than the amount requested.

The grant will be a lump sum grant. This means that it will reimburse a fixed amount, based on a lump sum or financing not linked to costs. The amount will be fixed by the granting authority on the basis of the estimated project budget and a funding rate of **50%**.

Budget categories and cost eligibility rules

The budget categories and cost eligibility rules are fixed in the Grant Agreement *(Data Sheet, point 3 and art 6)*.

Budget categories for this call:

- Lump sum contributions [25]

Specific cost eligibility rules for this call:

- the lump sum amount must be calculated in accordance with the methodology set out in the lump sum authorising decision and using the detailed budget table/calculator provided (if any)

- the lump sum calculation should respect the following conditions:

  - for lump sums based on estimated project budgets: the estimated budget must comply with the basic eligibility conditions for EU actual cost grants *(see AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement, art 6)*

  - for lump sums based on estimated project budgets: costs for financial support to third parties: can be included in the detailed budget table for grants or similar and prizes:

    - maximum amount per third party EUR 60 000 unless a higher amount is required because the objective of the action would otherwise be impossible or overly difficult to achieve and this is duly justified in the Application Form. The total amount of the EU contribution for financial support to third parties can be maximum 20% of the requested EU funding.

Reporting and payment arrangements

The reporting and payment arrangements are fixed in the Grant Agreement *(Data Sheet, point 4 and art 21 and 22)*.

After grant signature, you will normally receive a **prefinancing** to start working on the project (float of normally **65 %** of the maximum grant amount; exceptionally less or no prefinancing). The prefinancing will be paid 30 days from entry into force/10 days before starting date/financial guarantee (if required) – whichever is the latest.

There will be one or more **interim payments** (with cost reporting through the use of resources report).

Payment of the balance: At the end of the project, we will calculate your final grant amount. If the total of earlier payments is higher than the final grant amount, we will ask you (your coordinator) to pay back the difference (recovery).

All ppayments will be made to the coordinator.

⚠️   Please be aware that payments will be automatically lowered if one of your consortium members has outstanding debts towards the EU (granting authority or

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[25]   Decision of 31 March 2023 authorising the use of lump sum contributions under the Digital Europe Programme 2021-2027.

other EU bodies). Such debts will be offset by us — in line with the conditions set out in the Grant Agreement *(see art 22)*.

Please also note that you are responsible for keeping records on all the work done.

Prefinancing guarantees

If a prefinancing guarantee is required, it will be fixed in the Grant Agreement *(Data Sheet, point 4)*. The amount will be set during grant preparation and it will normally be equal or lower than the prefinancing for your grant.

The guarantee should be in euro and issued by an approved bank/financial institution established in an EU Member State. If you are established in a non-EU country and would like to provide a guarantee from a bank/financial institution in your country, please contact us (this may be exceptionally accepted, if it offers equivalent security).

Amounts blocked in bank accounts will NOT be accepted as financial guarantees.

Prefinancing guarantees are normally requested from the coordinator, for the consortium. They must be provided during grant preparation, in time to make the prefinancing (scanned copy via Portal AND original by post).

If agreed with us, the bank guarantee may be replaced by a guarantee from a third party.

The guarantee will be released at the end of the grant, in accordance with the conditions laid down in the Grant Agreement *(art 23)*.

Certificates

Depending on the type of action, size of grant amount and type of beneficiaries, you may be requested to submit different certificates. The types, schedules and thresholds for each certificate are fixed in the Grant Agreement *(Data Sheet, point 4 and art 24)*.

Liability regime for recoveries

The liability regime for recoveries will be fixed in the Grant Agreement *(Data Sheet point 4.4 and art 22).*

For beneficiaries, it is one of the following:

- limited joint and several liability with individual ceilings — *each beneficiary up to their maximum grant amount*

- unconditional joint and several liability — *each beneficiary up to the maximum grant amount for the action*

 or

- individual financial responsibility — *each beneficiary only for their own debts*.

In addition, the granting authority may require joint and several liability of affiliated entities (with their beneficiary).

Provisions concerning the project implementation

Security rules: *see Model Grant Agreement (art 13 and Annex 5)*

Ethics rules: *see Model Grant Agreement (art 14 and Annex 5)*

IPR rules: *see Model Grant Agreement (art 16 and Annex 5):*

- background and list of background: Yes

- protection of results: Yes

- exploitation of results: Yes

- rights of use on results: Yes

- access to results for policy purposes: Yes

- access to results in case of a public emergency: Yes

- access rights to ensure continuity and interoperability obligations: Yes

Communication, dissemination and visibility of funding: *see Model Grant Agreement (art 17 and Annex 5):*

- communication and dissemination plan: Yes

- dissemination of results: Yes

- additional dissemination obligations: No

- additional communication activities: Yes

- special logo: No

Specific rules for carrying out the action: *see Model Grant Agreement (art 18 and Annex 5):*

- specific rules for PAC Grants for Procurement: No

- specific rules for Grants for Financial Support: No

- specific rules for blending operations: No

Other specificities

n/a

Non-compliance and breach of contract

The Grant Agreement (chapter 5) provides for the measures we may take in case of breach of contract (and other non-compliance issues).

For more information, *see AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement*.

11. How to submit an application

All proposals must be submitted directly online via the Funding & Tenders Portal Electronic Submission System. Paper applications are NOT accepted.

Submission is a **2-step process**:

a) **create a user account and register your organisation**

To use the Submission System (the only way to apply), all participants need to create an EU Login user account.

Once you have an EULogin account, you can register your organisation in the Participant Register. When your registration is finalised, you will receive a 9-digit participant identification code (PIC).

b) **submit the proposal**

Access the Electronic Submission System via the Topic page in the Search Funding & Tenders section (or, for calls sent by invitation to submit a proposal, through the link provided in the invitation letter).

Submit your proposal in 3 parts, as follows:

- Part A includes administrative information about the applicant organisations (future coordinator, beneficiaries, affiliated entities and associated partners) and the summarised budget for the proposal. Fill it in directly online

- Part B (description of the action) covers the technical content of the proposal. Download the mandatory word template from the Submission System, fill it in and upload it as a PDF file

- Annexes (*see section 5*). Upload them as PDF file (single or multiple depending on the slots). Excel upload is sometimes possible, depending on the file type.

The proposal must keep to the **page limits** *(see section 5)*; excess pages will be disregarded.

Documents must be uploaded to the **right category** in the Submission System otherwise the proposal might be considered incomplete and thus inadmissible.

The proposal must be submitted **before the call deadline** (*see section 4*). After this deadline, the system is closed and proposals can no longer be submitted.

Once the proposal is submitted, you will receive a **confirmation e-mail** (with date and time of your application). If you do not receive this confirmation e-mail, it means your proposal has NOT been submitted. If you believe this is due to a fault in the Submission System, you should immediately file a complaint via the IT Helpdesk webform, explaining the circumstances and attaching a copy of the proposal (and, if possible, screenshots to show what happened).

Details on processes and procedures are described in the Online Manual. The Online Manual also contains the links to FAQs and detailed instructions regarding the Portal Electronic Exchange System.

12. Help

As far as possible, ***please try to find the answers you need yourself***, in this and the other documentation (we have limited resources for handling direct enquiries):

- Online Manual

- Topic Q&A on the Topic page (for call-specific questions in open calls; not applicable for actions by invitation)

- Portal FAQ (for general questions).

Please also consult the Topic page regularly, since we will use it to publish call updates. (For invitations, we will contact you directly in case of a call update).

Contact

For individual questions on the Portal Submission System, please contact the IT Helpdesk.

Non-IT related questions should be sent to the following email address: Here

Please indicate clearly the reference of the call and topic to which your question relates (see cover page).

13. Important

⚠️ **IMPORTANT**

- **Don't wait until the end —** Complete your application sufficiently in advance of the deadline to avoid any last minute **technical problems**. Problems due to last minute submissions *(e.g. congestion, etc)* will be entirely at your risk. Call deadlines can NOT be extended.

- **Consult** the Portal Topic page regularly. We will use it to publish updates and additional information on the call (call and topic updates).

- **Funding & Tenders Portal Electronic Exchange System —** By submitting the application, all participants **accept** to use the electronic exchange system in accordance with the Portal Terms & Conditions.

- **Registration —** Before submitting the application, all beneficiaries, affiliated entities and associated partners must be registered in the Participant Register. The participant identification code (PIC) (one per participant) is mandatory for the Application Form.

- **Consortium roles —** When setting up your consortium, you should think of organisations that help you reach objectives and solve problems.

  The roles should be attributed according to the level of participation in the project. Main participants should participate as **beneficiaries** or **affiliated entities**; other entities can participate as associated partners, subcontractors, third parties giving in-kind contributions. **Associated partners** and third parties giving in-kind contributions should bear their own costs (they will not become formal recipients of EU funding). **Subcontracting** should normally constitute a limited part and must be performed by third parties (not by one of the beneficiaries/affiliated entities). Subcontracting going beyond 30% of the total eligible costs must be justified in the application.

- **Coordinator —** In multi-beneficiary grants, the beneficiaries participate as consortium (group of beneficiaries). They will have to choose a coordinator, who will take care of the project management and coordination and will represent the consortium towards the granting authority. In mono-beneficiary grants, the single beneficiary will automatically be coordinator.

- **Affiliated entities** — Applicants may participate with affiliated entities (i.e. entities linked to a beneficiary which participate in the action with similar rights and obligations as the beneficiaries, but do not sign the grant and therefore do not become beneficiaries themselves). They will get a part of the grant money and must therefore comply with all the call conditions and be validated (just like beneficiaries); but they do not count towards the minimum eligibility criteria for consortium composition (if any).

- **Associated partners** — Applicants may participate with associated partners (i.e. partner organisations which participate in the action but without the right to get grant money). They participate without funding and therefore do not need to be validated.

- **Consortium agreement** — For practical and legal reasons it is recommended to set up internal arrangements that allow you to deal with exceptional or unforeseen circumstances (in all cases, even if not mandatory under the Grant Agreement). The consortium agreement also gives you the possibility to redistribute the grant money according to your own consortium-internal principles and parameters (for instance, one beneficiary can reattribute its grant money to another beneficiary). The consortium agreement thus allows you to customise the EU grant to the needs inside your consortium and can also help to protect you in case of disputes.

- **Balanced project budget —** Grant applications must ensure a balanced project budget and sufficient other resources to implement the project successfully *(e.g. own contributions, income generated by the action, financial contributions from third parties, etc)*. You may be requested to lower your estimated costs, if they are ineligible (including excessive).

- **Completed/ongoing projects** — Proposals for projects that have already been completed will be rejected; proposals for projects that have already started will be assessed on a case-by-case basis (in this case, no costs can be reimbursed for activities that took place before the project starting date/proposal submission).

- **No-profit rule** — Grants may NOT give a profit (i.e. surplus of revenues + EU grant over costs). This will be checked by us at the end of the project.

- **No cumulation of funding/no double funding** — It is strictly prohibited to cumulate funding from the EU budget (except under 'EU Synergies actions'). Outside such Synergies actions, any given action may receive only ONE grant from the EU budget and cost items may under NO circumstances be declared under two EU grants. If you would like to nonetheless benefit from different EU funding opportunities, projects must be designed as different actions, clearly delineated and separated for each grant (without overlaps).

- **Combination with EU operating grants** — Combination with EU operating grants is possible, if the project remains outside the operating grant work programme and you make sure that cost items are clearly separated in your accounting and NOT declared twice *(see AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement, art 6.2.E)*.

- **Multiple proposals —** Applicants may submit more than one proposal for *different* projects under the same call (and be awarded funding for them).

  Organisations may participate in several proposals.

  BUT: if there are several proposals for *very similar* projects, only one application will be accepted and evaluated; the applicants will be asked to withdraw the others (or they will be rejected).

- **Resubmission —** Proposals may be changed and re-submitted until the deadline for submission.

- **Rejection —** By submitting the application, all applicants accept the call conditions set out in this this Call Document (and the documents it refers to). Proposals that do not comply with all the call conditions will be **rejected**. This applies also to applicants: All applicants need to fulfil the criteria; if any one of them doesn't, they must be replaced or the entire proposal will be rejected.

- **Cancellation —** There may be circumstances which may require the cancellation of the call. In this case, you will be informed via a call or topic update. Please note that cancellations are without entitlement to compensation.

- **Language —** You can submit your proposal in any official EU language (project abstract/summary should however always be in English). For reasons of efficiency, we strongly advise you to use English for the entire application. If you need the call documentation in another official EU language, please submit a request within 10 days after call publication (for the contact information, *see section 12*).

- **Transparency —** In accordance with Article 38 of the EU Financial Regulation, information about EU grants awarded is published each year on the Europa website.

  This includes:

  - beneficiary names
  - beneficiary addresses
  - the purpose for which the grant was awarded
  - the maximum amount awarded.

  The publication can exceptionally be waived (on reasoned and duly substantiated request), if there is a risk that the disclosure could jeopardise your rights and freedoms under the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights or harm your commercial interests.

- **Data protection —** The submission of a proposal under this call involves the collection, use and processing of personal data. This data will be processed in accordance with the applicable legal framework. It will be processed solely for the purpose of evaluating your proposal, subsequent management of your grant and, if needed, programme monitoring, evaluation and communication. Details are explained in the Funding & Tenders Portal Privacy Statement.

<div align="right">**Annex 1**</div>

<div align="center">**Digital Europe types of action**</div>

The Digital Europe Programme uses the following actions to implement grants:

Simple Grants

Description: Simple Grants (SIMPLE) are a flexible type of action used by a large variety of topics and can cover most activities. The consortium will mostly use personnel costs to implement action tasks, activities with third parties (subcontracting, financial support, purchase) are possible but should be limited.

Funding rate: 50%

Payment model: Prefinancing – (x) interim payment(s) – final payment

SME Support Actions

Description: SME Support Actions (SME) are a type of action primarily consisting of activities directly aiming to support SMEs involved in building up and the deployment of the digital capacities. This type of action can also be used if SMEs need to be in the consortium and make investments to access the digital capacities.

Funding rate: 50% except for SMEs where a rate of 75% applies

Payment model: Prefinancing – (x) interim payment(s) – final payment

Coordination and Support Actions (CSAs)

Description: Coordination and Support Actions (CSAs) are a small type of action (a typical amount of 1-2 Mio) with the primary goal to support EU policies. Activities can include coordination between different actors for accompanying measures such as standardisation, dissemination, awareness-raising and communication, networking, coordination or support services, policy dialogues and mutual learning exercises and studies, including design studies for new infrastructure and may also include complementary activities of strategic planning, networking and coordination between programmes in different countries.

Funding rate: 100%

Payment model: Prefinancing – (x) interim payment(s) – final payment

Grants for Procurement

Description: Grants for Procurement (GP) are a special type of action where the main goal of the action (and thus the majority of the costs) consist of buying goods or services and/or subcontracting tasks. Contrary to the PAC Grants for Procurement *(see below)* there are no specific procurement rules (i.e. usual rules for purchase apply), nor is there a limit to 'contracting authorities/entities'. Personnel costs should be limited in this type of action; they are in general used to manage the grant, coordination between the beneficiaries, preparation of the procurements.

Funding rate: 50%

Payment model: Prefinancing - second prefinancing (to provide the necessary cash-flow to finance the procurements) – payment of the balance

PAC Grants for Procurement

Description: PAC Grants for Procurement (PACGP) are a specific type of action for procurement in grant agreements by 'contracting authorities/entities' as defined in the EU Public Procurement Directives (Directives 2014/24/EU , 2014/25/EU and 2009/81/EC) aiming at innovative digital goods and services (i.e. novel technologies on the way to commercialisation but not yet broadly available).

Funding rate: 50%

Payment model: Prefinancing - second prefinancing (to provide the necessary cash-flow to finance the procurements) – payment of the balance

Grants for Financial Support

Description: Grants for Financial Support (GfS) have a particular focus on cascading grants. The majority of the grant will be distributed via financial support to third parties with special provisions in the grant agreement, maximum amounts to third parties, multiple pre-financing and reporting obligations.

Annex 5 of the model grant agreements foresees specific rules for this type of action regarding conflict of interest, the principles of transparency, non-discrimination and sound financial management as well as the selection procedure and criteria.

In order to assure the co-financing obligation in the programme, the support to third parties should only cover 50% of third party costs.

Funding rate: 100% for the consortium, co-financing of 50% by the supported third party

Payment model: Prefinancing - second prefinancing (to provide the necessary cash-flow to finance sub-grants) – payment of the balance

Lump Sum Grants

Description: Lump Sum Grants (LS) reimburse a general lump sum for the entire project and the consortium as a whole. The lump sum is fixed ex-ante (at the latest at grant signature). on the basis of a methodology defined by the granting authority (either on the basis of a detailed project budget or other pre-defined parameters). The lump sum will cover all the beneficiaries' direct and indirect costs for the project. The beneficiaries do not need to report actual costs, they just need to claim the lump sum once the work is done. If the action is not properly implemented only part of the lump sum will be paid.

Funding rate: 100%/50%/50% and 75% (for SMEs)

Payment model: Prefinancing – (x) interim payment(s)– final payment

Framework Partnerships (FPAs) and Specific Grants (SGAs)

FPAs

Description: FPAs establish a long-term cooperation mechanism between the granting authority and the beneficiaries of grants. The FPA specifies the common objectives (action plan) and the procedure for awarding specific grants. The specific grants are awarded via identified beneficiary actions (with or without competition).

Funding rate: no funding for FPA

SGAs

Description: The SGAs are linked to an FPA and implement the action plan (or part of it). They are awarded via an invitation to submit a proposal (identified beneficiary action). The consortium composition should in principle match (meaning that only entities that are part of the FPA can participate in an SGA), but otherwise the implementation is rather flexible. FPAs and SGAs can have different coordinators; other partners of the FPA are free to participate in an SGA or not. There is no limit to the amount of SGAs signed under one FPA.

Funding rate: 50%

Payment model: Prefinancing – (x) interim payment(s) – final payment

<div align="right">**Annex 2**</div>

Eligibility restrictions under Articles 12(5) and (6) and 18(4) of the Digital Europe Regulation

Security restrictions Article 12(5) and (6)

If indicated in the Digital Europe Work Programme, and if justified for security reasons, topics can exclude the participation of legal entities *established* in a third country or DEP associated country, or established in the EU territory but *controlled* by a third country or third country legal entities (including DEP associated countries)[26].

This restriction is applicable for SO1 (High Performance Computing), SO2 (Artificial Intelligence) and SO3 (Cybersecurity), but at different levels.

- In the case of SO3, the provision is implemented in the strictest way. When activated, only entities established in the EU AND controlled from the EU will be able to participate; entities from associated countries (which are normally eligible) can NOT participate — unless otherwise provided in the Work Programme.

- In SO1 and SO2, entities established in associated countries and entities controlled from non-EU countries may participate, if they comply with the conditions set out in the Work Programme (usually:

  - for the associated countries: be formally associated to Digital Europe Programme and receive a positive assessment by the Commission on the replies to their associated country security questionnaire. [Currently none of the associated countries have passed the assessment yet.][Currently the following associated countries have a positive assessment: [insert names].]

  - for the participants: submission of a guarantee demonstrating that they have taken measures to ensure that their participation does not contravene security or EU strategic autonomy interests).

⚠ EEA countries (and participants from EEA countries) are exempted from these restrictions (and additional requirements) because EEA countries benefit from a status equivalent to the Member States.

In order to determine the ownership and control status, participants[27] will be required to fill in and submit an ownership control declaration*as part of the proposal (and later on be requested to submit supporting documents) *(see Guidance on participation in DEP, HE, EDF and CEF-DIG restricted calls)*.

In addition, where a guarantee is required, the participants will also have to fill in the guarantee template*, approved by the competent authorities of their country of establishment, and submit it to the granting authority which will assess its validity.

The activation of these restrictions will also make a number of specific provisions in the Grant Agreement applicable, such as country restrictions for eligible costs, country restrictions for subcontracting, and special rules for implementation, exploitation of results and transfers and exclusive licensing of results.

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[26] See Article 12(5) and (6) of the Digital Europe Regulation 2021/694.

[27] Beneficiaries and affiliated entities, associated partners and subcontractors — except for entities that are validated as public bodies by the Central Validation Service.

Thus:

- – participation in any capacity (as beneficiary, affiliated entity, associated partner, subcontractor or recipient of financial support to third parties) is also limited to entities established in and controlled from eligible countries

- – project activities (included subcontracted work) must take place in eligible countries

- – the Grant Agreement provides for specific IPR restrictions.

Strategic autonomy restrictions Article 18(4)

If indicated in the Digital Europe Work Programme, calls can limit the participation to entities *established* in the EU, and/or entities established in third countries associated to the programme for EU strategic autonomy reasons[28].

The activation of these restrictions will make a number of specific provisions in the Grant Agreement applicable, such as country restrictions for eligible costs, country restrictions for subcontracting, and special rules for implementation, exploitation of results and transfers and exclusive licensing of results.

For more information, *see Guidance on participation in DEP, HE, EDF and CEF-DIG restricted calls*.

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[28]   See Article 18(4) of the Digital Europe Regulation 2021/694.