



Research Fund for Coal and Steel (RFCS)

Information package

RFCS-2022-CSP-Big tickets for Steel
(RFCS-2022-CSP)

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B.1 – Future Low Emission Industries

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

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0. Introduction

This is a call for proposals for EU action grants in the field of Coal and Steel research under the **Research Fund for Coal and Steel (RFCS)**.

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

- Regulation 2018/1046 ([EU Financial Regulation](#))
- the basic act (RFCS Decision [2008/376](#)¹).

The call is launched in accordance with the 2022 Work Programme² and will be managed by the **European Research Executive Agency (REA)** ('Agency').

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, activities that can be funded and the expected results (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:
 - 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 [RFCS website](#) to consult the list of projects funded previously.

¹ [Council Decision of 29 April 2008 2008/376/EC](#) amended by the [Council Decision \(EU\) 2017/955 of 29 May 2017](#) and [Council Decision \(EU\) 2021/1094 of 28 June 2021](#) (OJ L 130, 20.5.2008, p. 7).

² Commission Implementing Decision C(2022)905 on the launching of three calls for proposals in year 2022 under the Research Programme of the Research Fund for Coal and Steel (RFCS) to finance research in the sectors related to the coal and steel industry.

1. Background

RFCS policy objectives

The [European Green Deal Communication](#) of the European Commission is the European growth strategy that aims to transform the EU into a fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy where there are no net emissions of greenhouse gases in 2050 and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use.

The Communication also states that all Union actions and policies should pull together to help the Union achieve a successful and just transition towards a sustainable future.

Within the European Green Deal objectives, applicants to the RFCS Calls should consider the following elements when preparing their proposals:

- Energy-intensive industries, such as steel [...] are indispensable to Europe's economy, as they supply several key value chains. **The decarbonisation and modernisation of this sector is essential.**
- The Commission will support clean steel breakthrough technologies leading to a zero-carbon steel making process by 2030.

The latest (2011-2017) [Monitoring and Assessment of the RFCS Research Programme report](#) highlights the major challenges for the European coal and steel industry: (i) to cut greenhouse gas emissions, (ii) to make sustainable use of energy and resources, and (iii) to develop new competitive, high-performance products and processes.

The RFCS package adopted on 19 July 2021 is in line with the Von der Leyen Commission's objectives and therefore enables the fund to tackle the sectors' climate and environmental challenges. This means in particular assisting the EU's coal and steel industries to reduce their emissions, thus contributing to the European Green Deal's goals and achieving a [Just Transition](#) towards a climate neutral economy.

The Research Fund for Coal and Steel is embedded in the political, scientific, and technological objectives of the Union, and complements the activities carried out in the Member States and within the existing Union Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration activities.

As, the European Commission encourages complementarity and sequencing among research programmes and supports the exchange of information between projects financed under different instruments, this Research Programme is meant to be complementary to national and other European financial instruments for research and innovation, including Horizon Europe, ESIF, ERDF, the Innovation Fund and LIFE.

RFCS Research objectives

The RFCS Research Programme (RFCS Decision [2021/1094](#)) has the following research objectives for Steel sector:³

Steel

³ [Council Decision of 29 April 2008 2008/376/EC](#) amended by the [Council Decision \(EU\) 2017/955 of 29 May 2017](#) and [Council Decision \(EU\) 2021/1094 of 28 June 2021](#) (OJ L 130, 20.5.2008, p. 7).

- New, sustainable and low-carbon steelmaking and finishing processes (Art. 8);
- Advanced steel grades and applications (Art. 9);
- Conservation of resources, protection of the environment and circular economy (Art. 10);
- Management of work force and working conditions (Art. 10a).

2. Objectives – Themes and priorities – Activities that can be funded – Expected impact

The present Call, in line with the new RFCS research programme adopted by Council Decision (EU) 2021/1094⁴, together with the other Council Decisions (EU) 2021/1207⁵ and 2021/1208, provides support for projects that will support the transition towards a climate-neutral Union economy by 2050, with the main objective of developing and demonstrating innovative clean steel breakthrough technologies leading to near-zero-carbon steel making, as well as fundamental changes within the steel landscape and overall carbon footprint.

Objectives

1. Preparation of steel CO/CO₂ gases for Carbon Capture Use and Storage (CCUS)

Proposals addressing this objective should cover at least two of the following sub-objectives:

- 1.1 Evaluation of compatibility of metallurgical gas streams from steel plants with current/future CCUS infrastructures
- 1.2 In-process integration of pre-/post preparation steps for CO/CO₂ capture steps in steel plants (e.g. Blast Furnace - Basic Oxygen Furnace (BF-BOF), Electric Arc Furnace (EAF), Direct Reduction (DR) plants)
- 1.3 Conditioning and separation of metallurgical gases (containing CO₂, CO, CH₄, etc.) to meet specifications for CCUS applications
- 1.4 Energetic integration in steel plants of preparation steps of steel process gases for reliable CCUS (cleaning, drying, sulphur removal, CO/CO₂ scrubbing, conversion, compression, heating, reforming, etc.)

2. Process Integration (PI) in steel plants to reduce the use of fossil carbon and associated CO₂ emissions.

Proposals addressing this objective should cover at least two of the following sub-objectives as well as outline how they would be particularly beneficial in the context of full or near full decarbonisation pathways for the concerned production technologies and not be limited to facilitate incremental change:

⁴ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32021D1094>

⁵ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32021D1207>

2.1 New pre-melting scrap (or other raw materials) technologies using available heat sources (waste heat, renewable energy or excess steel plant gases, etc.) which can be integrated in conventional steel plants and allow the reduction of the hot metal ratio in the BOF or the specific energy consumption in the EAF;

2.2 New or existing preparation processes for secondary carbon carriers (agglomeration, torrefaction, carbonisation, gasification, etc.), which can be integrated in conventional steel plants in order to substitute a significant fraction of solid fossil fuels (coal and coke);

2.3 Technologies allowing the integration of the production of hot reducing gases suitable to be injected in the blast furnace to reduce the fossil feedstock rate and demonstrating an overall CO₂ mitigation effect (i.e. using C-lean energy sources and/or valorising excess steel plant gases);

2.4 New technologies or injection means to increase or make more efficient the injection of reducing gases in the blast furnace, possibly at different levels of the reactor;

2.5 New materials and processes to efficiently transfer heat to semi-finished product from unconventional energy sources; this includes new combustion system in hot rolling mill furnaces, such as reheating and heat-treatment of cast and rolled products with a smart integration of fossil-free energy carriers, such as liquids (e.g. bioethanol, bio-methanol), electricity and gaseous feeds (e.g. green hydrogen and gaseous fuels resulting from iron and steelmaking process); these new energy sources require that furnace refractories and heat exchange materials are suitable for this new environment, and that the systems can be flexibly used and controlled depending on the availability of renewable resources (e.g. integration of hydrogen systems with green electricity);

2.6 New or adapted digital tools for advanced continuous monitoring, process optimisation or integrated control of emissions, and mass and energy flows

3. CO₂ neutral iron ore reduction (Increasing the use of pre-reduced iron carriers).

Proposals addressing this objective should cover at least two of the following sub-objectives:

3.1 Demonstrate at industrial scale a direct conversion of iron oxide to crude steel by H₂, when possible, also on existing hardware

3.2 Demonstrate the integration of CO₂ neutral iron ore reduction, smelting, heating technologies in steelmaking at industrial scale, when possible, also on existing hardware

3.3 Integrate CO₂ reduced or neutral DRI melting into existing steelmaking sites

3.4 Inject CO₂-reduced or CO₂ neutral C carriers into iron and steelmaking operations

3.5 Integration of electrolysis of iron ore and or liquid metal into existing steelmaking sites

4. Developing technologies to reduce the specific energy required to produce steel

Proposals addressing this objective should cover at least two of the following sub-objectives as well as outline how they would be particularly beneficial in the context of full or near full decarbonisation pathways for the concerned production technologies and not be limited to facilitate incremental change:

4.1 Innovative and improved continuous processes, for example, replacing more energy intensive batch processes;

4.2 Hot charge of slabs or blooms in hot rolling-mill furnaces, preheating non-fossil fuel feeds (e.g. of air by recuperators made with new shape or new materials, enriched air or oxygen);

4.3 Heating/preheating of raw materials and recycled material before charging to metallurgical processes by chemical and sensible energy from process gases;

4.4 Improvement of post combustion control valid for EAF, DRI and BF/BOF regarding their specific equipment and the relevant interconnection;

4.5 Novel technologies for recovery of high temperature waste heat on gases and intermediate products (e.g. slags, slabs, ...);

4.6 Integration in the steel production of new technologies for heat recovery at low temperature for gas (<200°C) and water (<100°C) (e.g. power generation at low temperature by Peltier cells, heat pumps, stirling cycles, rankine cycles,...);

4.7 Enhancing onsite energy storage (electricity, high temperature heat>120°C) implementing also heat transfer media not yet at the state-of-the-art in the steelmaking process chain (diathermic oil, molten salt, liquid metals);

4.8 Further development of tools to measure and demonstrate the performance of energy efficiency and GHG emissions reductions, including Life Cycle Assessment and Life Cycle Cost Analysis (LCA/LCCA);

4.9 Allowing smart energy use through the integrated energy management and storage until its reuse in existing processes as well as buffer solutions also for grid balancing.

Activities that can be funded (scope)

Proposers may submit proposals for either Pilot or Demonstration projects (see Art. 15 and Art. 16 of Council Decision 2008/376/EC⁶).

Specifically:

- Activities are expected to start at TRL 4-6 and achieve TRL 7-8 by the end of the project.
- Proposals should address the application of innovative technologies related to one or two of the four call objectives listed above. If addressing two call objectives, proposals should clearly identify which Work Packages address which sub-objective(s) of which objective(s).
- Proposals shall be in line with the general and specific objectives listed in the Memorandum of Understanding for the European partnership on Clean Steel launched in Horizon Europe⁷.

⁶ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32008D0376>

- Proposals need to show in the excellence part of the application form how they contribute to the multi-annual Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA)⁸ of the Clean Steel Partnership.
- If the proposal does not have direct relevance to achieving the European Green Deal goals and the full decarbonisation process of the steel sector for climate neutrality, this will be considered as a significant weakness by the expert evaluators.
- Proposals are expected to include an exploitation strategy outlining possible integration of the deliverables of the project (including the pilot/demonstrators) in an industrial environment and a preliminary assessment of their economic viability. When relevant, activities related to economic analysis in the direction of a business case or new business models can also be mentioned.
- Proposals are expected to include activities related to the development and dissemination of competencies to keep pace with new near-zero-carbon steel production processes, such digitalisation and to reflect the principle of lifelong learning.
- Proposals should be in line with the chapter on 'emerging techniques' of the "Best Available Techniques (BAT) Reference Document for Iron and Steel Production"⁹ to look in parallel at both decarbonisation and pollutant emissions and with the Industrial technology roadmap for low-carbon technologies in Energy Intensive Industries¹⁰.

Expected impact

Proposals have to show in the impact part of the application form that the expected project results directly contribute to the relevant operational objectives, KPIs and 2024-targets of the Clean Steel Partnership (Table 18, pp. 80 of SRIA) and to the [European Green Deal](#).

Each proposal shall include an assessment of anticipated industrial, economic, social and environmental benefits (Art. 26 of Council Decision 2008/376/EC, "Content of proposals").

3. Available budget

The available call budget is **EUR 104 000 000**.

We reserve the right not to award all available funds, depending on the proposals received and the results of the evaluation.

⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_2943

⁸ The Clean Steel Partnership SRIA is available on the ESTEP web site: <https://www.estep.eu/assets/Uploads/20210106-CSP-Roadmap-afterPublicConsultation2.pdf>

⁹ <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC69967>

¹⁰ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/f59d2692-cf12-11eb-ac72-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

4. Timetable and deadlines

Timetable and deadlines (indicative)	
Call opening:	3 March 2022
<u>Deadline for submission:</u>	<u>3 May 2022 – 17:00:00 CET (Brussels)</u>
Evaluation:	May-July 2022
Information on evaluation results:	September-October 2022
GA signature:	October/December 2022

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 [Search Funding & Tenders](#) 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** (*to be uploaded*):
 - detailed budget table (former Form B3) (*template available in the Submission System*)
 - list of previous projects (key projects for the last 4 years in the area of the topic) (*template available in Part B*)

Please note that the amounts entered into the summarised budget table (filled in directly online) must correspond to the amounts calculated in the detailed budget table. In case of discrepancies, the amounts in the online summarised budget table will prevail.

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

Eligible participants (eligible countries)

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

- be legal entities (public or private bodies, e.g. undertakings, public bodies, research organizations, higher or secondary education establishments or other legal entities) which carry out an RTD activity or substantially contribute to such an activity
- be established in one of the eligible countries, i.e.:
 - EU Member States (including overseas countries and territories (OCTs))
 - non-EU countries :
 - countries associated to the RFCS or countries which are in ongoing negotiations for an association agreement and where the agreement enters into force before grant signature ([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*).

Please note that, in RFCS, associated partners may participate only if their participation is in the EU interest.

Specific cases

Natural persons — Natural persons are eligible.

International organisations — International organisations are not eligible.

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 persons¹¹.

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'¹². ⚠ 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 (*see above*) may participate in the call and can sign grants if the negotiations are concluded before grant signature (with retroactive effect, if provided in the agreement).

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)*¹³ and entities covered by Commission Guidelines No [2013/C 205/05](#)¹⁴). 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](#).

Consortium composition

Proposals must be submitted by a consortium of:

- minimum 2 independent applicants (beneficiaries; not affiliated entities) from 2 different eligible countries

Independent — Independent means that none of the entities must be under the direct or indirect control of the other or under the same direct or indirect control as the other. For this purpose, control may, in particular, take either of the following forms:

- the direct or indirect holding of more than 50 % of the issued share capital, or of a majority of the voting rights
- the direct or indirect holding, in fact or in law, of decision-making powers.

The following relationships do not in themselves constitute control:

- if the entities have the same public investment corporation, institutional investor or venture-capital company with a direct or indirect holding of more than 50 % of the issued share capital or a majority of voting rights
- if the entities are owned or supervised by the same public body.

¹¹ See Article 197(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

¹² For the definitions, see Articles 187(2) and 197(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

¹³ 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](#).

¹⁴ Commission guidelines No [2013/C 205/05](#) on the eligibility of Israeli entities and their activities in the territories occupied by Israel since June 1967 for grants, prizes and financial instruments funded by the EU from 2014 onwards (OJEU C 205 of 19.07.2013, pp. 9-11).

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 not allowed.

Geographic location (target countries)

Proposals must relate to activities taking place in the eligible countries (*see above*).

Duration

Projects should normally range between 36 and 54 months.

Projects of longer duration may be accepted in duly justified cases. Extensions are possible, if duly justified and through an amendment.

Project budget

Project budgets (requested grant amount) are expected to range between EUR 5 and EUR 9 million per project (and exceptionally up to EUR 18 million for large demonstrators).

This does not however preclude the submission/selection of a proposal requesting other amounts. The grant awarded may be lower than the amount requested.

Ethics

Projects must comply with:

- highest ethical standards (including highest standards of research integrity) and
- applicable EU, international and national law.

Projects involving ethics issues will have to undergo an ethics review to authorise funding and may be made subject to specific ethics rules (which become part of the Grant Agreement in the form of ethics deliverables, *e.g. ethics committee opinions/notifications/authorisations required under national or EU law*).

7. Financial and operational capacity and exclusion

Financial capacity

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 'Quality and efficiency of 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:

- description of the consortium participants

- list of previous projects (key projects for the last 4 years in the area of the topic).

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 participate¹⁵:

- 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 misconduct¹⁶ (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 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 refused if it turns out that¹⁷:

- 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).

¹⁵ See Articles 136 and 141 of EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ 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 for each budget envelope (see section 3) 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 will be prioritised according to the scores they have been awarded for the criterion 'Impact'; when these scores are equal, priority will be based on scores for 'Excellence' and lastly 'Quality and efficiency of the implementation'.
- 2) If two proposals with the same overall score have the same scores for all 3 criteria:
 - the proposal with the highest percentage of participants of private for profit organisations will be ranked first
 - the proposal with the highest percentage of budget assigned in the proposal to private for profit organisations will be ranked first.

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.

 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:

- **Excellence (5 points):** clarity and consistency of project objectives and planning; extent to which they match the themes and priorities and objectives of the call; extent to which the proposed work is ambitious and goes beyond the state of the art; soundness of the proposed methodology, including the underlying concepts, models, assumptions, inter-disciplinary approaches
- **Impact (5 points):** viability of the pathways to achieve the expected outcomes and impacts specified in the call, and the likely scale and significance of the contributions from the project; suitability and quality of the measures to maximise the expected outcomes and impacts, as set out in the dissemination and exploitation plan, including communication activities
- **Quality and efficiency of the implementation (5 points):**
 - **Project design and implementation:** technical quality; logical links between the identified problems, needs and solutions proposed (logical frame concept); methodology for implementing the project (concept and methodology, management, procedures, timetable, risks and risk management, monitoring and evaluation); feasibility of the project within the proposed time frame; quality and effectiveness of the work plan, assessment of risks, and appropriateness of the effort assigned to work packages, and the resources overall; cost effectiveness (sufficient/appropriate budget for proper implementation; best value for money)
 - **Project team and cooperation arrangements:** quality of the consortium and project teams; appropriate procedures and problem-solving mechanisms for cooperating within the project teams and consortium; capacity and role of each participant, and the extent to which the consortium as a whole brings together the necessary expertise.

Award criteria	Minimum pass score	Maximum score
Excellence	3	5
Impact	3	5
Quality and efficiency of the implementation	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 call budget (i.e. up to the budget threshold). Other proposals will be rejected.

To ensure a balanced portfolio, the ranking list may be adapted to ensure that also proposals under the other call objectives (see section 2) are funded, provided that they have passed all thresholds.

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. Retroactive application can be granted exceptionally for duly justified reasons — but never earlier than the proposal submission date.

Project duration: *see section 6 above*

Projects of longer duration may be accepted in duly justified cases. 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:

- communication and dissemination plan
- comprehensive overview of the project (month 6)
- public publishable report (last month 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*).

The grant awarded may be lower than the amount requested.

The grant will be a budget-based mixed actual cost grant (actual costs, with unit cost and flat-rate elements). This means that it will reimburse ONLY certain types of costs (eligible costs) and costs that were *actually* incurred for your project (NOT the *budgeted* costs). For unit costs and flat-rates, you can charge the amounts calculated as explained in the Grant Agreement (*see art 6 and Annex 2 and 2a*).

The costs will be reimbursed at the funding rate fixed in the Grant Agreement: **50 %**

Grants may NOT produce a profit (i.e. surplus of revenues + EU grant over costs). For-profit organisations must declare their revenues and, if there is a profit, we will deduct it from the final grant amount (*see art 22.3*).

Moreover, please be aware that the final grant amount may be reduced in case of non-compliance with the Grant Agreement (*e.g. improper implementation, breach of obligations, etc*).

Budget categories and cost eligibility rules

The budget categories and cost eligibility rules are fixed in the Grant Agreement (Data Sheet, point 3, art 6 and Annex 2).

Budget categories for this call:

- A. Personnel costs
 - A.1 Employees, A.2 Natural persons under direct contract, A.3 Seconded persons
 - A.4 SME owners and natural person beneficiaries
- B. Subcontracting costs
- C. Purchase costs
 - C.2 Equipment
 - C.3 Other goods, works and services
- E. Indirect costs

Specific cost eligibility conditions for this call:

- personnel costs:
 - SME owner/natural person unit cost¹⁸ Yes
- equipment costs: depreciation OR full costs for listed equipment
- other cost categories:
 - costs for financial support to third parties: not allowed
- indirect cost flat-rate: 35% of the eligible personnel costs (category A, except volunteers costs, if any)
- VAT: non-deductible VAT is eligible (but please note that since 2013 VAT paid by beneficiaries that are public bodies acting as public authority is NOT eligible)
- other:
 - in-kind contributions for free are allowed, but cost-neutral, i.e. they cannot be declared as cost
 - project websites: communication costs for presenting the project on the participants' websites or social media accounts are eligible; costs for *separate* project websites are not eligible
 - other ineligible costs: No

Reporting and payment arrangements

¹⁸ Commission [Decision](#) of 20 October 2020 authorising the use of unit costs for the personnel costs of the owners of small and medium-sized enterprises and beneficiaries that are natural persons not receiving a salary for the work carried out by themselves under an action or work programme (C(2020)7715).


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 **40%** 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 payments 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 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 and the costs declared. The Grant Agreement contains additional record-keeping rules (*Data Sheet, point 3 and art 20*).

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 formally NOT linked to individual consortium members, which means that you are free to organise how to provide the guarantee amount (*by one or several beneficiaries, for the overall amount or several guarantees for partial amounts, by the beneficiary concerned or by another beneficiary, etc*). It is however important that the requested amount is covered and that the guarantee(s) are sent to us 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.

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

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
- additional information obligations relating to possible standardisation: Yes
- right to object to transfers and licensing: Yes
- rights of use on results: Yes
- access to results for policy purposes: Yes
- access to results in case of public emergency: No
- access rights to ensure continuity and interoperability obligations: No

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: Yes
- additional communication activities: Yes
- open science: No
- additional obligations regarding the validation of scientific publications: No
- additional open science obligations in case of public emergency: No

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

- Recruitment and working conditions for researchers: Yes

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 EU Login 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):

- 1) [Online Manual](#)
- 2) FAQs on the Topic page (for call-specific questions in open calls; not applicable for actions by invitation)
- 3) [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:

REA-RFCS@ec.europa.eu.

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 if participation is in the EU interest (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).
- **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 double funding** — There is a strict prohibition of double 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 declared to two different EU actions.
- **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).
- **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 Model 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 a 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 one of them (or it 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](#).

Technological readiness levels

Where the call conditions require a specific Technology Readiness Level (TRL), the following definitions apply, unless otherwise specified:

- TRL 1 — Basic principles observed
- TRL 2 — Technology concept formulated
- TRL 3 — Experimental proof of concept
- TRL 4 — Technology validated in a lab
- TRL 5 — Technology validated in a relevant environment (industrially relevant environment in the case of key enabling technologies)
- TRL 6 — Technology demonstrated in a relevant environment (industrially relevant environment in the case of key enabling technologies)
- TRL 7 — System prototype demonstration in an operational environment
- TRL 8 — System complete and qualified
- TRL 9 — Actual system proven in an operational environment (competitive manufacturing in the case of key enabling technologies, or in space)

Evaluation form questions

1. Excellence (5 points)

Clarity and consistency of project, objectives and planning.

- Are the objectives of the proposal clearly described? Are they measurable and verifiable?

Extent to which the proposal matches the themes, priorities and objectives of the call.

Extent to which the proposed work is ambitious and goes beyond the state of the art.

- To what extent do the applicants demonstrate their knowledge of the international state-of-the-art?
- To what extent is the proposed work ambitious, innovative, and goes beyond the state of the art (does it include ground-breaking R&I, novel concepts and approaches)?

Soundness of the proposed methodology, including the underlying concepts, models, assumptions, inter-disciplinary approaches

- Are the proposed methods and techniques, including any important challenges identified, clearly described?
- Is the scientific and technical feasibility of the proposed work, convincingly addressed?

2. Impact (5 points)

Viability of the pathways to achieve the expected outcomes and impacts specified in the call, and the likely scale and significance of the contributions from the project.

- Are there relevant and substantial expected benefits for the European Steel sector? Are these benefits credible?
- Do the expected results address the European Green Deal-related challenges and/or bring other important benefits for society?
- Are the scale and significance of the project's contribution appropriate to the expected outcomes and impacts?

Suitability and quality of the measures to maximise the expected outcomes and impacts, as set out in the dissemination and exploitation plan, including communication activities.

- To what extent do the expected results meet the technology readiness level (TRL) specified in the call?
- Are economic issues adequately addressed and is the further demonstration or deployment of the proposed technology convincing?
- Are the proposed communication, dissemination, and exploitation measures suitable for the project and of good quality?

3. Quality and efficiency of the implementation (5 points)

Technical quality. Logical links between the identified problems, needs and solutions proposed (logical frame concept). Methodology for implementing the project (concept and methodology, management, procedures, timetable, risks and risk management, monitoring and evaluation). Feasibility of the project within the proposed time frame. Quality and effectiveness of the work plan, assessment of risks, and appropriateness of the effort assigned to work packages, and the resources overall.

- Are the work packages and claimed financial resources clearly described, well defined and appropriate?
- Is the overall schedule suitable for achieving the project objectives?
- Is the interaction of the partners and tasks clearly defined and functional to achieving the project objectives?

Quality of the consortium and project teams. Appropriate procedures and problem-solving mechanisms for cooperating within the project teams and consortium. Capacity and role of each participant, and the extent to which the consortium as a whole brings together the necessary expertise.

- Do individual partners have the necessary operational capacity to carry out the proposed action?