



Single Market Programme (SMP COSME)

Call for proposals

EU SME Centre in China – phase IV
(SMP-COSME-2021-SMECC)

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EUROPEAN INNOVATION COUNCIL AND SMEs EXECUTIVE AGENCY (EISMEA)

Department I - Innovation ecosystems, SMP / Entrepreneurship and Consumers
Unit I-02 SMP / COSME Pillar

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

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0. Introduction

This is a call for proposals for EU **action grants** in the field of “improving the competitiveness of enterprises, particularly SMEs, and supporting their access to markets” under the Programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, which is part of the **Single Market Programme** (hereinafter also referred to as **SMP COSME**).

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

- Regulation 2018/1046 ([EU Financial Regulation](#)¹)
- the basic act ([Single Market Programme Regulation \(EU\) 2021/690](#)²).

The call is launched in accordance with the 2021 SMP COSME Work Programme – Annex II COSME Pillar³ and will be managed by the **European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency**⁴ (hereinafter also referred to as **EISMEA** or ‘Agency’).

The call covers the following **topic**:

- **SMP-COSME-2021-SMECC– EU SME Centre in China – phase IV**

Each project application under the call must address only the above-mentioned topic.

Applicants (beneficiaries and affiliated entities – see *Section 6*) cannot submit more than one proposal under this call.

We invite you to read the **call documentation** on the Funding & Tenders Portal Topic page 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)

¹ Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 July 2018 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union (...).

² Regulation (EU) 2021/690 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 April 2021 establishing a programme for the internal market, competitiveness of enterprises, including small and medium-sized enterprises, the area of plants, animals, food and feed, and European statistics (Single Market Programme) and repealing Regulations (EU) No 99/2013, (EU) No 1287/2013, (EU) No 254/2014 and (EU) No 652/2014 (OJ L 153/1 of 3.5.2021).

³ Annex II to Commission Implementing Decision C(2021)3046 final of 6 May 2021 on the financing of the Programme for single market, competitiveness of enterprises, including small and medium-sized enterprises, and European statistics and the adoption of the work programme for 2021-2024.

⁴ EISMEA was set up by Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2021/173 of 12 February 2021 establishing the European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency, the European Health and Digital Executive Agency, the European Research Executive Agency, the European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency, the European Research Council Executive Agency, and the European Education and Culture Executive Agency and repealing Implementing Decisions 2013/801/EU, 2013/771/EU, 2013/778/EU, 2013/779/EU, 2013/776/EU and 2013/770/EU (OJ L 50/9 of 15.2.2021). The Agency started operating on 1 April 2021.

- admissibility and eligibility conditions, criteria for financial and operational capacity and exclusion (sections 5, 6 and 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 [EISMEA](#) website to consult the list of projects funded previously.

1. Background

1.1 Introduction

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are the primary vehicle of innovation in the various ecosystems as outlined in the EU's updated Communication on European Industrial Strategy⁵. Whereas they are considered as crucial engines for growth and job creation, their competitiveness is affected by a limited exploitation of international opportunities and innovation prospects in the Single Market and beyond.

In this context, the Programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (COSME) under the Single Market Programme (SMP) 2021-2027⁶ aims to promote growth and to strengthen the competitiveness and sustainability of enterprises in the European Union (EU) and beyond.

The European Innovation Council and SME Executive Agency⁷ is entrusted by the European Commission (hereinafter also referred to as the Commission or the EC) with the implementation, *inter alia*, of significant parts of the SMP COSME programme. In this respect, this call for proposals, managed by EISMEA contributes to achieving one of the main goals of the SMP COSME programme 2021⁸.

The overall objective of this action is to help EU SMEs as well as SMEs from SMP COSME associated countries (hereinafter also referred as target SMEs – see *section 6*) doing business in China. China is a key market for trade and investment for EU SMEs. It offers many business opportunities but it is also a challenging market. Access to the Chinese market is complex and the regulatory and business environment is changing constantly and very quickly. For this reason, there is a need to provide appropriate business support

⁵ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions COM(2021)350 final of 5 May 2021 "Updating the 2020 New Industrial Strategy: Building a stronger Single Market for Europe's recovery".

⁶ Ref. footnotes 2.

⁷ Ref. footnote 4.

⁸ Ref. footnote 3.

services to increase the knowledge of SMEs and raise their awareness on China as well as to support companies in developing trade with and investment in China.

The purpose of the present call for proposals is to ensure the continuation of the activities of the EU SME Centre in China (hereinafter also referred to as the "Centre") building on the achievements and experience of previous phases of the Centre, acquired from 2010 until now.

1.2. Policy Context

EU actions to support SMEs

The European Commission recognises small and medium-sized enterprises as the backbone of Europe's economy. They represent 99,8 % of all businesses in the Union, provide two thirds of jobs and contribute substantially to the creation of new quality jobs in all sectors.

This is why the European Union has implemented over time different initiatives dedicated to the development of SMEs. In terms of policy making, one of the most known are the EU SME Strategy and the Small Business Act for Europe (SBA)⁹. They provide a comprehensive SME policy framework for the EU and also promote the 'Think Small First' principle, which helps develop SME-friendly legislation.

In terms of funded initiatives, the European Union has been supporting SMEs via different actions implemented under different programmes. In the current multiannual financial framework, to contribute to the implementation of the EU SME Strategy, the European Commission has put forward several actions to be carried out under the COSME pillar of the SMP. One of the main priorities of the SMP COSME pillar is to support enterprises so that they can benefit from the EU's Single Market and make the most out of the opportunities offered by markets outside the EU. Moreover, the SMP COSME pillar also provides support to scaling-up activities addressed to SMEs at all crucial stages of their development, including support to internationalisation, uptake of innovation and commercialisation activities.

Specific actions facilitate SME access to markets outside the EU, in particular by providing information about business opportunities and existing barriers to market entry and, about public procurement and customs rules and procedures, and by improving business support services in terms of standards and intellectual property rights (IPR) in priority third countries. Those actions complement but do not duplicate the core trade promotion activities of the EU Member States.

One of the most successful initiatives funded under the SMP COSME pillar is the Enterprise Europe Network¹⁰. The latter helps SMEs to innovate and grow internationally thanks to its antennas in all EU Member States, in SMP COSME associated countries as well as in several third countries outside the EU. Since 2008, the Enterprise Europe Network has been helping SMEs to find business and technology partners, understand EU legislation, participate in EU funded programmes and access to finance, including EU financial instruments.

In addition, the SMP COSME pillar sets up and ensures the upgraded functioning of the Enterprise Europe Network, which will also support SMEs to benefit from opportunities

⁹ Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions "An SME Strategy for a sustainable and digital Europe" COM(2020)103 final, and Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions "Think Small First - A "Small Business Act for Europe" COM(2008)394 final.

¹⁰ <https://een.ec.europa.eu>.

and overcome barriers to doing business within the Single Market, and to internationalise and export outside it¹¹.

EU-China economic relationship

The European Union and China are two of the three largest economies and traders in the world. China is now the EU's second biggest trading partner behind the United States and the EU is China's biggest trading partner. Both sides are committed to a comprehensive strategic partnership, as expressed in the EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation.

The 2016 Strategy on China¹² remains the cornerstone of EU engagement, ensuring that relations with this strategic partner are set on a fair, balanced and mutually beneficial course.

The most recent EU policy document on China, EU-China – A strategic outlook¹³, which was endorsed by the European Council in October 2020, aims, inter alia, at achieving a more balanced and reciprocal economic relationship (Action 5) while promoting reciprocity and opening up procurement opportunities in China (Action 6).

At the 21st EU-China Summit held in Brussels in April 2019, both sides committed in a Joint Statement¹⁴ “to ensure equitable and mutually beneficial cooperation in bilateral trade and investment”. They reiterate their willingness “to enhance bilateral economic cooperation, trade and investment and to provide each other with broader and more facilitated, non-discriminatory market access”. Such willingness was demonstrated in December 2020 with the conclusion in principle of the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment¹⁵.

EU-China Trade and Investment relationship

Trade and investment between the EU and China has been growing at a fast pace. China and Europe trade on average over EUR 1 billion a day. Europe's imports of goods from China have grown by 5.6% in 2020, reaching the value of EUR 383.4 billion. This amounts to 22.4% of EU third-country imports. At the same time, in 2020 the EU exported goods of the value of EUR 202.6 billion to China, amounting to 10.5% of EU third-country exports and representing a 2.2% increase from 2019. Over the last 10 years, EU exports of goods to China grew from EUR 82.4 billion (2009) to EUR 202.6 billion (2020). The EU main exports to China are machinery and equipment, motor vehicles, aircraft and chemicals.

EU-China trade in services amounts to more than 10% of total EU trade in goods, and the EU's exports of services make up 19% of EU's total exports of goods. Europe is also one of the top-five sources of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in China, with inward FDI stocks of EUR 69 billion in 2019. For the full year 2020, the value of completed European FDI transactions in China reached \$ 6.7 billion, which represents a sharp 38% decrease from the \$ 10.8 billion registered in 2019 but is still above the levels of investment in 2017 and 2018. The EU is committed to develop a more balanced and reciprocal relationship with China. The EU wants to ensure a mutually beneficial economic relationship through the respect of a level playing field for all companies in line with the rule-based multilateral order and, in particular, regarding intellectual property rights obligations.

¹¹ Ref. [Single Market Programme \(SMP COSME\) Call for Proposals Enterprise Europe Network \(SMP-COSME-2021-EEN\)](#) published on 11 May 2021.

¹² JOIN(2016)30 final of 22 June 2016, Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council “Elements for a new EU strategy on China”.

¹³ <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-eu-china-a-strategic-outlook.pdf>.

¹⁴ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/04/09/joint-statement-of-the-21st-eu-china-summit>.

¹⁵ <https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/press/index.cfm?id=2233>

SMEs and the Chinese market

The Chinese market, notably by its dimension and its fast-growing development, can offer a host of new opportunities for European businesses to reach new markets for their products and services, to broaden their operating scope and diversify their distribution channels through e-commerce and innovative methods of distribution developed in China. However, to successfully penetrate any new market, companies need to overcome many obstacles and face certain risks. These obstacles range from gaining market information, locating suitable partners and finding possible customers to more complex issues, such as compliance with foreign laws, IPR protection and forced or unwanted technology transfers. Additional issues that affect international business in China are the lack of a level playing field for foreign companies, industrial policies and non-tariff measures that tend to discriminate against foreign and private companies, subsidies and access to financing issues, transparency and predictability in government, rulemaking and enforcement, insufficient protection and enforcement of intellectual property rights.

Since 2020 EU businesses have also been facing difficulties because of the spread of COVID-19, including the reduction in client orders, supply chain disruptions, liquidity/financing issues, and severe restrictions on travel to China. All these concerns have been identified by the EUCCC Inter-Chamber Small and Medium-sized Enterprises Working Group¹⁶.

These obstacles prove especially challenging for SMEs, as they are usually less equipped with in-house expertise and financial or human resources than larger companies. Therefore, they find it very hard to navigate the different regulations and to identify the ones that apply to their business. Many also need help to assess opportunities and risks correctly. Consequently, many SMEs are not able to engage successfully on the Chinese market for these and other reasons.

Some of the main barriers for China, as identified by SMEs, are: knowledge of foreign language, lack of adequate market information, poor access to financing, difficult bureaucratic procedures, different business culture, laws and regulations.

Market access obstacles are the key reason why only few EU SMEs are exporting to China. The Flash Eurobarometer 486 of 2020 showed that just over a quarter (26%) of EU SMEs exported goods or services, whereas 23% exported to other EU countries, 9% exported to European countries outside the EU, 4% exported to North America and only 3% exported to China.

To successfully operate their business in China, SMEs have to gain prior and practical information on the characteristics of the Chinese market, which often differ from the European market, e.g. the strong development of e-commerce and the generalised use of mobile payments (notably through WeChat and AliPay), the various market segments present wherever opportunities arise across the Chinese geography, the specific demand and expectations of Chinese customers, etc.

Therefore, considering the economic potential and size of the Chinese market, the extent of difficulties faced by SMEs in accessing the market and the gaps in existing first-line business support services for SMEs, the European Parliament decided to finance, through a preparatory action, the establishment of an EU Centre for Support to European SMEs (EU SME Centre). The first phase of the Centre ran from 2010 to 2014 and was followed by a second phase in 2014, running until April 2020. Phase III started in October 2020 and is currently ongoing. Phases I and II were financed by the European Commission (DG INTPA, previously DG DEVCO) and funded under the ICI+ programme. Phase III is currently funded under the COSME programme 2014-2020 managed by the European Commission (EISMEA – previously EASME – and the Directorate General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, hereinafter referred to as “DG GROW”).

¹⁶ <https://www.eurochamber.com.cn/en/publications-archive/841/Inter-Chamber-Small-and-Medium-sized-Enterprise-Working-Group-Position-Paper-2020-2-021>.

The purpose of the present call for proposals is to carry out phase IV of the EU SME Centre building up on the achievements of phases I and II, and on the activities carried out under phase III. The project has been broadly successful, developing over the years a widely recognised and consulted online "[Knowledge Centre](#)"¹⁷, improving general understanding amongst target SMEs about the Chinese market, business conditions, opportunities and risks, as well as supporting the activities of EU SMEs planning to do business in China.

The next phase (36-months) will be funded under the SMP COSME pillar via this call for proposals managed by EISMEA with the support of DG GROW.

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

The overall objective of the EU SME Centre is to provide a first line of advice to target SMEs willing to go on the Chinese market, to increase and diversify their knowledge acquisition, exports, imports and investments. In this regard, the Centre will continue to offer a set of business support services to help target SMEs overcome barriers and constraints they face in their efforts to enter the Chinese market.

The EU SME Centre in China is expected to make efforts to reach a wider audience and to develop its activities vis-à-vis SMEs from EU and SMP COSME associated countries.

EISMEA and the concerned European Commission services of DG GROW will facilitate the transition between phases III and IV, including the access to results and tools that are necessary to implement the project funded under this call.

Objectives

The EU SME Centre phase IV will not only further develop the activities of previous phases, especially the ones carried out in the most recent phase III, but will also provide new business support services that reflect, on the one hand, the needs of SMEs in the post COVID-19 pandemic and, on the other hand, the new EU policy priorities and the state of EU-China economic relations.

Thus, the specific objectives of this call for proposals are:

- Assisting target SMEs to navigate the web to identify most suitable EU and non-EU (i.e. from Member States and SMP COSME associated countries – *see section 6*) business support organisations (hereinafter also referred to as “BSOs”) at their disposal, that can provide target SMEs with the most appropriate support ;
- Assessing target SMEs’ readiness towards establishing and developing their commercial presence on the Chinese market;
- Assisting target SMEs to establish and develop a sustainable commercial presence on the Chinese market (through knowledge acquisition, exports, imports and investments);
- Advising target SMEs on the risks and opportunities of the Chinese market so that they can take informed decisions on envisaged business relations with Chinese partners;
- Improving synergies and best practice sharing among EU (and when applicable non-EU) BSOs at European, national and regional level, with the ultimate goal of helping the target SMEs intending to do business in China;
- Creating or further developing synergies with other EU funded actions, in particular

¹⁷ <https://www.eusmecentre.org.cn>.

with the SME IPR Helpdesk¹⁸, with whom cooperation should be seamless, but also with the Enterprise Europe Network and other relevant actions;

- Strengthening European advocacy for EU and SMP COSME associated countries' business communities, in particular SMEs, in relation to their business activities in China.

Themes and priorities (scope)

The Centre will provide general business and legal support services, will offer information about market opportunities and market conditions in China and will provide networking opportunities with relevant potential partners to SMEs with a desire to enter or expand their operations in China.

The specific themes and priorities of this call for proposals are:

- Ensuring the business continuity of the Centre throughout the project. In this regard, beneficiaries must be able to carry out most of the proposed activities also online if for epidemiological or any other reasons does not allow the organisation of in-person events/meetings is not possible. If some activities cannot be implemented online, alternatives must be proposed by the beneficiaries.
- Offering online or hybrid business support services if their impact in terms of active participation and effectiveness is the same or higher than in-person activities. Experience acquired during the recent COVID-19 pandemic can serve as a benchmark.
- Identifying new challenges related to the current COVID-19 epidemiological situation, as well as the existence of new barriers imposed by the "new normal", i.e. by the epidemiological conditions and by the subsequent safety measures both in China and in the EU. Dedicated activities to help companies operate in this new context shall be proposed.
- Ensuring that the activities of the Centre are coherent with the broader EU-China strategy, i.e. promoting coordination and developing fruitful cooperation and synergies with other EU-funded actions (in particular the SME IPR Helpdesk and the Enterprise Europe Network), EU policy initiatives and other European players (e.g. National Trade Promotion Organisations, Chambers of Commerce) both in China and in the EU.
- Assuming more publicly the role of SMEs' "first point of contact." Applicants are requested to provide, as an annex to their proposal, a detailed outreach and communication strategy covering the entire duration of the project. The strategy shall put greater emphasis on outreach activities among target SMEs willing to go to China and ensuring an accurate communication of the services provided by the Centre, as well as of those that are better provided by other EU or non-EU (i.e. Member States or SMP COSME associated countries) BSOs.
- Whilst maintaining a generalist approach as SMEs' "first point of contact", the Centre shall also focus on a limited set of pre-identified relevant economic sectors to continue improving the offer of value-added services at the disposal of target SMEs (see mandatory activities under paragraph Activities that can be funded).

Activities that can be funded (scope)

The selected consortium is expected to put in place a robust and varied set of activities to achieve the above-mentioned objectives and results in accordance with the established themes and priorities. The following paragraphs provide a mandatory but non-exhaustive list of activities, which shall be carried out in the framework of this SMP COSME action.

¹⁸ <https://www.ipr-hub.eu>.

Applicants are encouraged to propose other and possibly innovative activities, which can increase the added-value of the services offered by the Centre.

All activities have to be implemented, amongst others, in compliance with the applicable data protection rules.

The Centre helps to improve general knowledge of the opportunities and challenges of the Chinese market among target SMEs, and successfully supports target SMEs intending to start, or to expand, their business in China. The Centre helps to improve knowledge of the challenges, risks and opportunities presented by the ongoing and future epidemiological situation in China as well as the general business environment of this country (Result 1).

Emphasis will be placed on geographic areas where representations of EU Member States and SMP COSME associated countries, including Chambers of Commerce, are not present or do not have significant resources.

Emphasis will also be placed on the identification of risks, challenges and opportunities presented by the ongoing epidemiological situation and its future developments in China and in the rest of the world.

The business support offered by the Centre will complement the activities of trade promotion organisations and/or national Chambers in China of EU Member States and SMP COSME associated countries. In this regard, it will provide target SMEs with first line information about the Chinese market, including information about other business support organisations which may better assist them with more specialised services. The Centre will redirect target SMEs to national BSOs (when present in China) or to other public or private entities.

A primary activity of the Centre will be the management and continuous update and upgrade of the Centre's website, a comprehensive online platform accessible by all target SMEs. The website shall:

- help raise awareness and knowledge among target SMEs on China's large and complex market;
- provide updated basic market entry services and basic legal advice, including information about Chinese technical regulations, standards and financing available, as well as intellectual property matters in close collaboration with the China SME IPR Helpdesk;
- provide a user-friendly direct contact with the Centre, including with the Centre's staff, both for general enquiries about the services provided by the Centre and for guidance concerning other BSOs that might be best placed to reply to their queries and provide assistance;
- store and share (authorised) recordings of events, training, workshops, webinars as well as related information material (slides, working documents, etc.).

As soon as the Grant Agreement implementation starts, the successful consortium will be given the rights of use of the major outcomes generated throughout phase III and, if necessary, throughout phases II and I, of the Centre. Besides, they will be granted access to and will take over the management of the [Centre's website](#) currently managed by the beneficiaries carrying out phase III. A handover meeting will be organised with the support of EISMEA, DG GROW and the EU Delegation to China.

Here is a mandatory but not exhaustive list of other activities that the Centre shall carry out:

- Organising roadshows, webinars, trainings and other events which facilitate knowledge acquisition and networking among target SMEs;
- Gathering, compiling, analysing and translating information about the Chinese market that is relevant to target SMEs, while prioritising selected sectors;

- Giving target SMEs broad access to publications, trainings and webinars on how to develop business in China;
- Informing target SMEs, which opt in, about events and trainings on China organised by other BSOs or by entities from EU Member States or SMP COSME associated countries to which they can participate, as well as about relevant publications;
- Providing advice and/or conducting initial due diligence on potential business partners;
- Provide advice on the difficulties, challenges and opportunities presented by the ongoing epidemiological situation and its future developments;
- Organising at least one activity per calendar year in the identified "special-focus areas".

The action strengthens the coordination of China-based EU business support actions through better local coordination as well as interaction with similar or connected EU-funded actions in Asia and in the EU. It also enhances coordination on policy and advocacy papers and supports European business advocacy to help develop more balanced and reciprocal economic relationships (Result 2).

Here is a mandatory but not exhaustive list of activities that the Centre will carry out:

- Facilitating the networking between existing EU business support organisations in China and in the EU / SMP COSME associated countries to exchange and promote best practices, as well as among target SMEs currently in China or looking to enter the Chinese market;
- Providing advocacy and advocacy-related contributions to local EU Delegation-led Market Access Teams and EU-led negotiations in the trade and investment areas. If requested, providing inputs to relevant initiatives led by private-led stakeholders, for instance the European Chamber of Commerce in China;
- In addition to the reports linked to the contractual obligations of the Grant Agreement, providing EISMEA and DG GROW on a regular basis with feedback and relevant information about the challenges faced by target SMEs assisted by the Centre, as well as about success stories. This should contribute to the update of EU policies and/or support actions.
- Feeding analysis and substance into the EU-China industrial and regulatory dialogues as well as other relevant fora.

The Centre will develop active partnerships and synergies with business networks and BSOs based in the EU and in SMP COSME associated countries in order to ensure a significant outreach and marketing of its services to SMEs, in particular those having no operations in China so far (Result 3).

As mentioned in Section 2, proposals submitted under this call for proposals shall include an annex with a detailed outreach and communication strategy aimed at increasing SMEs' awareness of the services available via the Centre. Such strategy shall describe the proposed methodology for the identification of the target SMEs to focus outreach strategies on and clearly lay out a menu of activities and concrete actions that will be undertaken to reach target SMEs.

Here is a mandatory but not exhaustive list of activities that the Centre will carry out:

- Establishing and strengthening partnerships with business networks and business support organisations based in the EU and in SMP COSME associated countries, including pan-European networks, such as the Enterprise Europe Network and its

Business Cooperation Centres in China and the SME IPR Helpdesk in China, and enabling those organisations to better advise their member companies.

- Applicants may provide examples of existing partnerships with BSOs based in the EU, SMP COSME associated countries or China in which they are involved and which may be relevant in the framework of this call.
- Providing business support services at European pavilions, European fairs, European business or matchmaking events, etc.
- Establishing a "one working day maximum" response delay to simple enquiries received via the Centre's website, and in particular to enquiries related to services that can best be provided by other EU and SMP COSME associated countries organisations with which the Centre has partnerships and close cooperation.

Deliverables

Through the Centre's online platform users, and in particular target SMEs, will have access to:

- relevant information, publications and videos giving practical advice on how to develop durably their presence on the Chinese market and providing essential information on the most suitable sectors and markets for target SMEs (selected sectors and markets shall be proposed by the consortium and validated by EISMEA) (RESULT 1);
- a self-diagnosis tool to make a prior assessment of SMEs' readiness to develop their presence on the Chinese market (RESULT 1);
- an 'ask-the-expert service' providing a first-line answer to more specific questions (e.g. legal, standardisation and distribution matters, notably through e-commerce, the changing epidemiological situation and the difficulties, challenges and opportunities presented by it, etc.) (RESULT 1);
- a fast-response helpdesk to help users identify the most suitable BSO, Trade Promotion Organisation (hereinafter also referred to as TPO) or other actor for specific queries or tailor-made services (RESULT 3);
- webinars and practical business trainings, info-sessions, networking opportunities (RESULT 1 and RESULT 2);
- an annual report of the advocacy actions undertaken by the Centre (RESULT 2).

In addition to the deliverables listed above, the selected consortium shall organise at least one activity per calendar year in a "special focus area" (RESULT 1). Special focus areas shall be identified in advance, be justified, and be validated by EISMEA, and shall not run counter to the EU's industrial strategy and open strategic autonomy drives. Special consideration will be given to those focus areas that align with the EU's policy priorities, including the twin digital and green transformations. Activities under this umbrella shall be organised in collaboration with EU and SMP COSME associated countries' BSOs. Should the economic or political priorities of the EU change during the implementation of the project, the proposed choice can be re-evaluated in consultation with the contracting authority.

The Centre shall provide information in a structured and user-friendly manner and disseminate it also through any other appropriate and widely accessible digital tools, including social media.

Regarding events (seminars, information sessions, conferences), online or hybrid online/offline formats are highly recommended not only until the epidemiological situation and the related restrictions are eased but also afterwards if such formats are deemed suitable to achieve the expected outreach and goals. In-person events can be organised in the EU, SMP COSME countries as well as in China. Web streaming of on-the-

spot events is essential to ensure a broad participation of target SMEs and other relevant stakeholders.

Information about the Chinese market shall primarily be disseminated directly to target SMEs. However, to reach a wider audience, information will also be channelled in the EU, in SMP COSME associated countries and in China through international advisers from business support organisations that could serve as relevant multipliers. The consortium shall therefore identify within its outreach strategy any and all other dissemination tools or entities that the Centre will exploit to reach target SMEs.

The performance of the action shall be assessed by EISMEA as explained in *section 10 paragraph Milestones and deliverables*.

Please note that the results of the action (including webpages, reports, training material and other documents relating to it) will be used by the Agency, by the European Union and any potential successor Centre.

Performance indicators

The performance of the selected consortium shall be measured based on the following indicators:

- Number of SME enquiries (breakdown per country and sector) and number of contacts of the EU SME Centre in China for information and advice purposes;
- Number of referrals of target SMEs to other support organisations;
- Number of SMEs satisfied with the services provided (e.g. testimonials, post-service customer evaluations, etc.);
- Number of persons/SMEs trained through webinars and workshops;
- Number of online publications (and number of downloads);
- Number of recipients of the Centre's newsletters;
- Number of events organised both in the EU and SMP COSME associated countries and in China to inform target SMEs;
- Number of activities organised concerning "special focus areas";
- Number of participants in the above-mentioned events;
- Number of regulatory issues or market access barriers reported affecting specifically SMEs;
- Number of partnerships/synergies/joint activities developed with other business support organisations both in the EU and SMP COSME associated countries and in China;
- Number of activities organised/attended to facilitate the networking between existing business support organisations in China and in the EU / SMP COSME associated countries, and to facilitate networking between target SMEs.

Expected impact

The phase IV of the EU SME Centre is expected to achieve the following results:

Result 1

The Centre shall improve the general knowledge and awareness among target SMEs of the risks and opportunities of the Chinese market, of the framework conditions to operate on that market as well as of prospects and relevant challenges for target SMEs intending to start or to expand their business in China.

The Centre shall improve the knowledge and awareness among target SMEs of the difficulties, challenges and/or opportunities related to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis and to future post-pandemic conditions. Such activities of the Centre shall be carried out with full awareness and in full respect of the wider contemporary EU-China Strategy.

Result 2

The Centre shall strengthen the coordination of China-based support actions for SMEs put in place by EU's and SMP COSME associated countries' organisations through better coordination with similar actions in China and in the EU / SMP COSME associated countries, as appropriate. The Centre shall also support European business advocacy, especially for the benefit of target SMEs.

The phase IV of the Centre must reach a large number of SMEs, in a systematic and integrated way, with particular but not exclusive attention to those SMEs having limited prospects of receiving support from national BSOs in China. Additionally, it will support EU business community driven advocacy for SMEs in close cooperation with the EU Chambers of Commerce in China.

Result 3

The Centre shall develop active partnerships with intermediary BSOs based in the EU and in SMP COSME associated countries to ensure sufficient outreach and marketing of its services to SMEs, in particular target SMEs having no operations in China or that may be unaware of the services of the SME Centre.

3. Available budget

The available call budget is **EUR 2 400 000**.

Only one project will be funded under this call.

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


4. Timetable and deadlines

Timetable and deadlines (indicative)	
Call opening:	16 September 2021
<u>Deadline for submission:</u>	<u>24 November 2021 – 17:00:00 CET (Brussels)</u>
Evaluation:	December 2021 - February 2022
Information on evaluation results:	February - March 2022
GA signature:	April/May 2022

5. Admissibility

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 as PDF in the system*)
- **Mandatory annexes and supporting documents** (*to be uploaded as PDF files/included in Part B. Detailed Budget Table is to be uploaded as excel file*):
 - Detailed budget table (*mandatory excel template available in the Submission System*)¹⁹;
 - List of previous key projects carried out in the last four years (*mandatory table already included as an Annex to the Application form available in the Submission System*);
 - Activity reports of last year (*mandatory excel template available in the Submission System as well as under Section 14 – Annex 1*);
 - Outreach and communication strategy – maximum 15 pages (*mandatory Word template available in the Submission System as well as under Section 14 – Annex 2*);
 - CVs (short outlines) of core project team.

¹⁹ Please read carefully the instructions on how to fill in the detailed budget table. Only costs categories eligible for this call for proposals can be filled in. Please take the following steps before filling the table in with your budget data: 1. Open "EC Data" sheet; 2. Click the button "Unprotect all Sheets (Configuration)"; 3. Insert the value 0 in Column B "1=Yes/0=No" for cost categories D1 (financial support to third parties) and D2 (PPI procurement costs); 4. Click the button "Save & Update Detailed Budget table"; 5. Start filling in the Detailed Budget Table.

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 **50 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).
- be business support organisations from EU Member States and SMP COSME associated countries, entities representing groups of companies, including Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), and/or business economic interests of EU or SMP COSME associated countries and offering in the first instance non-individualised services for promoting trade and investment between Europe and China.

Applicants can be (non-exhaustive list):

- bilateral or European Chambers of commerce,
 - sector specific trade organisations,
 - industrial and professional associations,
 - employers' federations,
 - business intermediary non-governmental organisations,
 - sector specific agencies supporting SMEs in their trade,
 - investment or commercial activities.
- be established in one of the eligible countries, i.e.:
 - EU Member State (including overseas countries and territories (OCTs))
 - non-EU countries:
 - listed EEA countries and countries associated to the COSME pillar of the Single Market Programme 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](#))

- China, pursuant to Article 9 (2) (c) of the SMP Regulation²⁰.

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


Exceptional funding — Entities from other countries (not listed above) are exceptionally eligible, if the granting authority considers their participation essential for the implementation of the action.

Natural persons — Natural persons are NOT eligible.

International organisations — International organisations are eligible. The rules on eligible countries do not apply to them.

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 persons²¹.

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'²².  Please note that if the action will be implemented by the members, they should also participate 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 list of participating countries above*) may participate in the call and can sign grants as from the entry into force of these agreements 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)*²³ and entities covered by Commission Guidelines No [2013/C 205/05](#)²⁴). 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).

²⁰ Regulation (EU) 2021/690, Article 9 (2) Eligible entities:
Subject to the eligibility conditions laid down in paragraphs 3 to 7, the following entities shall be eligible under the Programme: [...]

(c) *exceptionally, legal entities established in a third country which is not associated to the Programme, provided that the participation of those legal entities in the action falls within the objectives of the Programme and the activities outside the Union contribute to the effectiveness of interventions carried out in Member State territories to which the Treaties apply.*

²¹ See Article 197(2) (c) EU Financial Regulation 2018/1046.

²² For the definitions, see Articles 187(2) and 197(2) (c) EU Financial Regulation 2018/1046.

²³ 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](#).

²⁴ [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 (OJ C 205/9 of 19.07.2013).



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 **at least four [4] applicants** (beneficiaries; not affiliated entities), which complies with the following conditions:

- **minimum 2** entities must be **established in the EU** and must be from different Member States and
- **minimum 2** entities must be **established in China**.

Considering the specificity of the action it is strongly recommended that the consortium leader is established in the EU.

Applicants (beneficiaries and affiliated entities) cannot submit more than one proposal under this call.

Eligible activities

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

The funded project should take into account the results of projects supported by other EU funding programmes, and in particular the results achieved under phase I, II and III of the Centre as mentioned in the sections above. 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.*) as described in the sections above.

Financial support to third parties is not allowed.

Geographic location (target countries)

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

Duration

The project shall last **36 months** (extension is possible, if duly justified and through an amendment).

Project budget

Project budget (maximum grant amount) is expected to be around **EUR 2 400 000** per project but this does not preclude the submission/selection of proposals requesting other amounts.

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).

In particular, the consortium shall demonstrate to have the following minimum expertise:

- At least two members of the project team must have at least five (5) years of experience in managing EU transnational projects, both in terms of grant management and project coordination;
- Members of the project team in charge of action tasks (i.e. services to SMEs, publications, synergies with other EU funded initiatives/BSOs/TPOs, advocacy, etc.) must have at least three (3) years of experience in one or more of those fields: business support services (especially to SMEs), internationalisation

(preferably with focus on EU-China trade relations), Intellectual Property, Chinese legal and economic framework, training activities for companies, advocacy.

This capacity will be assessed together with the 'Quality' 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:

- **CV/profiles** (qualifications and experience) of the staff responsible for managing and implementing the project (including staff providing administrative and/or technical support)
 - ➔ *Free format, i.e. no template is provided. However, it is highly recommended to use the same CV/profile format for all proposed team members.*
- The CVs/profiles must include at least the following information: academic and professional background, areas of expertise and years of experience in a given area, experience and role in similar projects; language knowledge.
 - ➔ Applicants are also requested to submit a "*recap table*" including the names of all proposed project team members and their role/task(s) in the project.
- **Description of the consortium participants**, with a particular focus on the experience, knowledge, expertise and skills relevant to this action.
 - ➔ *Free format, i.e. no template is provided;*
- applicants' **activity reports** of last year
 - ➔ *Template is provided in the Submission System as well as under Section 14 – Annex 1);*
- **List of previous projects** (key projects for the last four years). Applicants must provide a short description of each project, including the budget, and a hyperlink to it/to its main results, if available, and indicate their role in the project.
 - ➔ *Mandatory table already included as an Annex to the Application form available in the Submission System.*
- If relevant, a description of the technical equipment, tools or facilities and patents at the disposal of the applicant in relation to the proposal.

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 participate²⁵:

- 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);

²⁵ See Articles 136 and 141 of EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

- 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 misconduct²⁶ (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 No [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 that²⁷:

- 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).

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 total 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:

²⁶ 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.

²⁷ See Article 141 EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

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

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 are 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:

- **Relevance:**

clarity and consistency of the project in terms of objectives, activities and planning; extent to which the project matches the themes, the priorities and the objectives of the call; European/trans-national dimension and overall European added value of the proposal; extent to which the proposed activities meet the needs of target SMEs and other stakeholders; appropriateness of the proposed partnerships/synergies; possibility to use the results beyond the project; complementarities with other EU funded actions and potential to develop mutual trust; contribution to the EU strategic and policy context (30 points)

- **Quality:**

- **Project design and implementation:**

technical quality; logical links between the identified problems/needs and the solutions and resources proposed (logical frame concept); robustness of the proposed activities; innovative approach, if any; methodology for implementing the project (proposed management of the project and of the resources, procedures, risk management, internal monitoring); feasibility of the project within the proposed time frame; cost effectiveness (sufficient/appropriate budget for proper implementation; best value for money, allocation of resources per work package/task) (30 points)

– **Project team and cooperation arrangements:**

suitability of the consortium as a whole to reach the objectives of the call; quality of the consortium and project team; allocation of responsibilities among the consortium partners according to their skills/competences/planned contribution to the project; appropriate procedures and problem-solving mechanisms for cooperating within the project team(s) and consortium (30 points)

– **Impact:**

ambition and expected long-term impact of the results on target groups/general public; extent to which the proposed impact indicators are realistic and measurable; effectiveness of the proposed activities, including the outreach and communication strategy; appropriate dissemination strategy for ensuring long-term impact; sustainability of results after EU funding ends (**10 points**).

Award criteria	Minimum pass score	Maximum score
Relevance	16	30
Quality – Project design and implementation	16	30
Quality – Project team and cooperation arrangements	16	30
Impact	6	10
Overall (pass) scores	70	100

Maximum points: 100 points.

Individual thresholds per criterion: 16/30, 16/30, 16/30 and 6/10 points.

Overall threshold: 70 points.

Proposals that pass the individual thresholds AND the overall threshold will be considered for funding – within the limits of the available call budget. 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. Retroactive application can be granted exceptionally for duly justified reasons – but never earlier than the proposal submission date.

Project duration: 36 months (extensions will be possible only exceptionally, for duly justified reasons and through an amendment).

Activities should start in April 2022.

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 performance of the action shall be assessed by EISMEA, as follows:

- A progress reports not linked to payment after 9 months;
- An interim report linked to an interim payment after 18 months;
- A progress report not linked to payment after 27 months;
- A final report linked to the final payment at the end of the project (36 months)

A project review of this action will also be conducted at the halfway mark. The Centre shall cooperate with the external experts identified by EISMEA by providing them with any information requested which is relevant, reasonable, and necessary for the evaluation of the Centre's performance.

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): *see section 6 above*. 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 (**90%**).

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.1 Travel and subsistence
- C.2 Equipment
- C.3 Other goods, works and services
- D. Other cost categories (not applicable)
- E. Indirect costs

Specific cost eligibility conditions for this call:

- personnel costs:
 - SME owner/natural person unit cost²⁸: Yes
- travel and subsistence unit cost²⁹: Yes
- equipment costs: depreciation
- other cost categories:
 - costs for financial support to third parties: not allowed
- indirect cost flat-rate: 7% of the eligible direct costs (categories A-D and exempted specific cost categories, 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
 - kick off meeting: costs for kick-off meeting organised by the granting authority are eligible (travel costs for maximum 2 persons, return ticket to Brussels and accommodation for one night) only if the meeting takes place after the project starting date set out in the Grant Agreement; the starting date can be changed through an amendment, if needed
 - 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

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 **50%** 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*.


²⁸ [Commission Decision C\(2020\)7715](#) 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.

²⁹ [Commission Decision C\(2021\)35](#) of 12 January 2021 authorising the use of unit costs for travel, accommodation and subsistence costs under an action or work programme under the 2021-2027 multi-annual financial framework.

There will be **one interim payment** with detailed cost reporting.

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 note that you are responsible for keeping records on all the work done and the costs declared.

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

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

- list of background: No
- rights of use on results: Yes for EISMEA, the EU and potential successor Centre
- 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
- additional communication and dissemination activities: Yes

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

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 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 files. Detailed Budget Table is to be upload as an excel file.

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](#)
- FAQs 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 at the latest 3 working days before the call deadline (*see section 4*):

EISMEA-SMP-COSME-ENQUIRIES@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 (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 (beneficiaries and affiliated entities – *see Section 6*) cannot submit more than one proposal under this call.
- **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](#).

14. Annexes

1. Activity Report Template

2. Outreach Strategy Template

1. Activity Report Template

Single Market Programme (SMP COSME)

Call for proposals: **EU-SME Centre in China - phase IV**

Call identifier: SMP-COSME-2021-SMECC

List of the most recent activity reports of the applicants

Please convert file to PDF before uploading (do not print and scan this file).

<i>Name of the organisation</i>	<i>Link to the website or other official documents</i>

2. Outreach Strategy Template

Single Market Programme (SMP COSME)

Call for proposals

EU SME Centre in China – phase IV (SMP-COSME-2021-SMECC)

Annex: Outreach Strategy

Maximum 15 pages¹

Project name:	
Project acronym:	[acronym]
Communication correspondent:	[name SURNAME] [email] [consortium partner]

¹ Instructions are not to be included in the 15 page limit.

As requested in the call for proposals, applicants must submit a detailed description of their **outreach and communication strategy covering the entire duration of the project** (36 months). Applicants must also fill in a **calendar with the indicative timeline of the proposed activities**.

The outreach and communication strategy must be comprehensive, structured in a clear way and tailor-made to the proposed project. Applicants must explain how the strategy will be implemented, also with practical elements and examples, how it will contribute to effectively and efficiently meet the objectives of the call and achieve the expected results of the project, and how it will be assessed and evaluated.

The outreach strategy must clearly:

- Define the specific and measurable objectives of the strategy;
- Identify the main target group(s) and, if relevant, the additional potential target group(s)*;
- Define the messages (with clear identification of tailored messages to the different target groups, if relevant);
- Identify the communication channels (with clear identification of channels per target group, if relevant);
- Describe and quantify the communication activities (e.g. organise X events of certain type; define and launch a paid campaign on social media producing at least Y posts on ...; etc.);
- Identify potential synergies (e.g. existing campaigns) and multipliers and describe the strategy of how to cooperate with/involve them;
- Define the geographical scope of the strategy and present, if any, actions targeted to specific geographic areas (e.g. specific EU countries);
- Define the methodology to evaluate the impact and results of the implementation of the strategy (KPIs in light of the objectives of the strategy) from a qualitative and quantitative perspective.

* The outreach and communication strategy must consider the main target group identified in the call, namely SMEs from the EU and SMP COSME associated countries, as well as other stakeholders, such as Business Support organizations (BSOs), Trade Partner Organizations (TPOs) and entities involved in other EU initiatives.

We recommend to carefully **read the call text and the provisions set out in the model Grant Agreement** and to take them into account while filling in this template. Regarding indicators, applicants may consult the [Communication Network Indicators infographic](#).

DESCRIPTION OF THE OUTREACH AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Please describe the overall outreach strategy, addressing all elements listed in the instructions above.

OUTREACH AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGY PER PROPOSED ACTIVITY

(Please add lines according to the number of proposed activities)

Activity Nr.	Proposed activity:
Short description:	
Responsible consortium partner:	
Contributing consortium partner(s):	
To which expected results (1 – 2 – 3)/objectives does the activity contribute?	
Under which work package will the activity be carried out / to which work package will the activity contribute to?	
This activity will be reported as <i>(tick 1 option)</i> : <input type="checkbox"/> as a stand-alone deliverable <input type="checkbox"/> as part of a deliverable, i.e. combined with another activity <input type="checkbox"/> in the progress/interim/final report	
Indicative implementation time:	
Target group(s):	
Chosen channel(s):	
Expected quantitative / qualitative impact <i>(overall and, if applicable, also per year/phase)</i> :	
KPIs to evaluate results/impact:	
Allocated human resources:	
Allocated budget <i>(please refer to proposed project budget and provide breakdown per sub-activity, if needed)</i> :	

Activity Nr.	Proposed activity:
Short description:	
Responsible consortium partner:	
Contributing consortium partner(s):	
To which expected results (1 – 2 – 3)/objectives does the activity contribute?	
Under which work package will the activity be carried out / to which work package will the activity contribute to?	
This activity will be reported as (<i>tick 1 option</i>): <input type="checkbox"/> as a stand-alone deliverable <input type="checkbox"/> as part of a deliverable, i.e. combined with another activity <input type="checkbox"/> in the progress/interim/final report	
Indicative implementation time:	
Target group(s):	
Chosen channel(s):	
Expected quantitative / qualitative impact (<i>overall and, if applicable, also per year/phase</i>):	
KPIs to evaluate results/impact:	
Allocated human resources:	
Allocated budget (<i>please refer to proposed project budget and provide breakdown per sub-activity, if needed</i>):	

INDICATIVE TIMELINE OF THE PROPOSED ACTIVITIES

Fill in the calendar identifying activities with the number attributed in the tables above and indicating with an X in which month(s) they will be implemented

Attention! The timeline must be consistent with the one identified in the tables above.

2022												
Activity	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC

