



Single Market Programme (SMP COSME)

Call for proposals

European Agri-food Sustainability Cluster Partnerships
(SMP-COSME-2023-AGRICLUSTER)

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EUROPEAN INNOVATION COUNCIL AND SMEs EXECUTIVE AGENCY (EISMEA)

EISMEA.I – Innovation ecosystems, SMP/Entrepreneurship and Consumers
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CALL FOR PROPOSALS

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0. Introduction

This is a call for proposals for EU **action grants** in the field of sustainability of the agri-food industrial eco-system and cluster collaboration under the Competitiveness of Enterprises and SMEs strand of the **Single Market Programme (SMP COSME)**.

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

- Regulation 2018/1046 ([EU Financial Regulation](#))
- the basic act (SMP Regulation [2021/690](#)¹).

The call is launched in accordance with the 2023-2024 SMP Work Programme² and will be managed by the **European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency (EISMEA)** ('Agency').

The call covers the following **topic**:

- **SMP-COSME-2023-AGRICLUSTER — European Agri-food Sustainability Cluster Partnerships**

Each project application under the call must address this topic. For multiple applications see "section 6 – Eligibility".

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:

¹ 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) (OJ L 153, 3.5.2021, p. 1).

² Commission Implementing Decision C(2023) 1119 final of 22.2.2023 on the financing 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 and the adoption of the work programme for 2023-2024.

- 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

The Farm to Fork Strategy

The Farm to Fork Strategy³ is at the heart of the European Green Deal aiming to make food systems fair, healthy and environmentally friendly. Food systems can only be resilient to crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and counter unprecedented inflation if they are sustainable. We need to redesign our food systems, which today account for nearly one-third of global GHG emissions. In many cases they consume large amounts of natural resources, result in biodiversity loss and negative health impacts (due to both under- and over-nutrition) and do not allow fair economic returns and livelihoods for all actors. The Farm to Fork Strategy aims to accelerate our transition to a sustainable food system that should:

- have a neutral or positive environmental impact
- help to mitigate climate change and adapt to its impacts
- reverse the loss of biodiversity
- ensure food security, nutrition and public health, making sure that everyone has access to sufficient, safe, nutritious, sustainable food
- preserve affordability of food while generating fairer economic returns, fostering competitiveness of the EU supply sector and promoting fair trade.

The EU Code of Conduct on Responsible Food Business and Marketing Practices

The EU Code of Conduct on Responsible Food Business and Marketing Practices⁴ is one of the first deliverables of the Farm to Fork Strategy and an integral part of its action plan. It sets out the actions that the actors 'between the farm and the fork', such as food processors, food service operators and retailers, can voluntarily commit to undertake to tangibly improve and communicate their sustainability performance. These actions can be directly relevant and implementable within their own operations or may encourage collaboration with industry peers and other food system stakeholders (such as farmers and consumers) to make similar changes. This voluntary Code was launched on 5 July 2021.

³ European Commission (2020). Farm to Fork Strategy. https://food.ec.europa.eu/horizontal-topics/farm-fork-strategy_en.

⁴ European Commission (2021). The EU Code of Conduct on Responsible Food Business and Marketing practices. https://food.ec.europa.eu/horizontal-topics/farm-fork-strategy/sustainable-food-processing/code-conduct_en.

The Code includes a set of 7 aspirational objectives, each with specific targets and a list of indicative, tangible and measurable actions, which actually contribute to a food environment that makes healthy and sustainable food choices easier. Commitments may take the form of a declaration of engagement and actions in major areas, together with an agreement to move towards higher levels of ambition within a defined timeframe. The Code also includes a framework for commitments by food and drink companies and associations to ambitious, measurable actions under the objectives of the Code. The signatories of the Code also share best practices and have exchanges with a view to creating future partnerships.

A tool for agri-food SMEs to register and evaluate their performance based on the Code's objectives is going to be available in 2023 on the ECCP website⁵, making the link with the Green Transition Support⁶ database which offers a large number of resource efficiency measures including for the agri-food industry, which could also be implemented by companies.

Green Transition Support

The green transition marks one of two pillars of the EU's industrial strategy: Progress towards a digital and green economy.

Through this "twin transition" the EU wants to ensure future competitiveness of its industries on a global market. The green transition, more concretely, summarises the journey towards a climate neutral, cleaner, and more circular EU economy. This goal can be divided into many sub-goals and involves many different sectors that are elaborated in the European Green Deal strategy package.

Greening Europe's economy means greening products, processes, and business models. European businesses have two important roles to play in this:

- On the one hand, they have to work on reducing their own negative environmental impact, e.g. emissions, material and energy use, etc.
- On the other hand, they should use their practical knowledge and innovative capacity to accelerate the green transition by providing affordable, clean technology solutions and by developing new business models.

The green transition also represents important opportunities i.e. for businesses to increase their competitiveness and resilience. Saving resources in many cases equals cost savings and those who offer solutions first will hold a greater competitive advantage in an area with increasing relevance in a world of scarce resources.

Transitions and change, however, also pose a challenge for businesses, especially for SMEs. Making the right decisions at the right time requires access to the most relevant information, tools and know-how.

The Green Transition Platform is hosted by the European Cluster Collaboration Platform⁷ and offers:

- Good practice examples to inspire, e.g. corporate decision-makers
- An opportunity for businesses to submit and share their solutions and achievements
- Practical tools to guide businesses through their green transition

⁵ [Homepage | European Cluster Collaboration Platform](#)

⁶ [Green Transition Support | European Cluster Collaboration Platform](#)

⁷ [Green Transition Support | European Cluster Collaboration Platform.](#)

- Contacts to potential partners, top international knowledge, and technical expertise
- An opportunity for support providers to build further alliances
- Updates on news and events within the community
- An interactive network.

Food Inflation in the EU

In 2022 the agri-food sector was faced with an unprecedented inflation due mainly to the energy and fuel price increases. According to Eurostat, food inflation reached over 18% in November 2022, second only to energy as the largest contributor to the EU inflation rate and affecting particularly prices of essential food items such as bread, milk, eggs, and cheese as well as oils and fats. The EU food and drink industry association FoodDrinkEurope estimated based on Eurostat - that food price increases in Member States, range from a 49.2% in Hungary, to 15.7% in Belgium, Cyprus (15.1%) or Portugal - 20.6%. Many other Member States witnessed an increase in the range of two additional percentage points⁸.

The major causes of food price inflation are related to the high energy prices and the very strong increase in global prices for agricultural commodities due to the unprovoked and unjustified Russian invasion of Ukraine that also led to a sharp increase in input costs, as well as the drought of 2022. While commodity prices have declined over recent months, they remain relatively high and are expected to continue to weigh on consumer prices. Further to agricultural commodities inflation, food and drink producers, as well as retailers, are facing inflation in energy, transport, packaging (pulp and paper, plastic packing goods, light metal packaging). This has resulted in increased pressure on all actors in the food supply chain.

In this context, with a view to countering food inflation and contributing to supporting the competitiveness of the food and drink industrial eco-system in the EU, it appears crucial to support its food and drink SMEs in implementing changes in the way they produce, distribute and operate with their partners in order to become more sustainable individually and collectively.

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

SMP-COSME-2023-AGRICLUSTER — European Agri-food Sustainability Cluster Partnerships

Objectives

The main objective of this call for proposals is to support both preparatory and implementation actions for the establishment and development of new 'European Agri-food Sustainability Cluster Partnerships' supporting the implementation of the EU Code of Conduct on Responsible Food Business and Marketing Practices by SMEs. The call focuses specifically on boosting the uptake by SMEs of resource-efficiency technologies and countering food inflation in the EU. This call for proposals is

⁸ FoodDrinkEurope (2022). Data and Trends of the European Food Industry 2022. <https://www.fooddrinkeurope.eu/resource/data-trends-of-the-european-food-and-drink-industry-2022/>

targeting food processing SMEs (including food and drink producers) in the middle-part of the agri-food value-chain. While acknowledging the importance of working closely with partners, including farmers, primary agricultural producers and the retail part of the agri-food value-chain are not directly targeted by the support of this action.

Moreover, the call for proposals has the following sub-objectives:

- Networking: to identify and strengthen existing agri-food industry support organisations of different types and maturity levels and network them together.
- Upgrading: to support the development of agri-food cluster organisations in more EU regions, building on existing industry support organisations, with the objective that those organisations support better the resource-efficiency and the sustainability transition of their SMEs.
- Capacity-building: to create and maintain long-term sustainability expertise in agri-food clusters, industry support organisations and technology centres on all objectives of the EU Code of Conduct on Responsible Food Business and Marketing Practices, with a view to establishing operational capacity to support SMEs on the Code of Conduct implementation.

Themes and priorities (scope)

This call for proposals covers the following **10 themes**, proposed for the implementation of specific aspirational objectives of the EU Code of Conduct on Responsible Food Business and Marketing Practices:

1. *Improve the nutritional composition and environmental footprint of food products/meals, e.g. through product reformulation and new product development/ innovation*
2. *Optimise and develop innovative solutions (e.g. in relation to packaging, ingredients) to prevent food waste during transportation, distribution, home storage and use*
3. *Identify and implement measures to improve the material efficiency of processes, e.g. explore the causes and potential for preventing and reducing (food) waste and losses*
4. *Optimise the use of raw materials through valorisation*
5. *Improve collaboration along the food supply chain to minimise food losses and waste (e.g. new product development from co-products or discarded products)*
6. *Reduce energy use and improve energy efficiency for production through the use of less energy-intensive and low-carbon technologies*
7. *Increase the use of renewable energy sources (e.g. solar, wind, sustainable biomass, co-products)*
8. *Improve water-efficiency*
9. *Reduce net emissions by applying sustainable bio(-economy)-based solutions*
10. *Improve sustainability of food and drink packaging (e.g. through re-use and re-fill solutions, greater, increased content of recycled and/or renewable*

materials in food packaging)

Applicants have to choose **minimum 1 and maximum 3 themes from the above list.**

Applicants have to choose **at least one theme** aiming at **improving resource efficiency to directly counter food inflation** among **themes no. 3 to 8⁹.**

The choice of the themes should be based on the specific needs identified with companies. For this purpose, it is strongly recommended to consult at least 50 SMEs per partnerships before determining the theme(s) chosen. The Code of Conduct web tool on the European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP)¹⁰ can be used to evaluate the SMEs sustainability improvement priorities. Each Partnership will have to demonstrate the rationale behind the choice of the theme(s) in the proposal, based on the result of the preliminary consultation of SMEs.

The Partnerships have to group partners with SMEs having similar production processes, i.e. in **one sub-sector of the agri-food industrial ecosystem**, in order to have synergies and similar technological needs between the SMEs of the partners.

Activities that can be funded

Attention: All eight activities listed below are mandatory!

Activity 1: Selection of agri-food SMEs to be supported

For the purpose of identifying and selecting the agri-food SMEs that will be supported within the project, each Partnership will reach out to the maximum possible agri-food SMEs in their areas. Each cluster or industry support organisation in the project will reach out to a minimum of 50 agri-food SMEs within its network or geographical area (for example: a partnership composed by organisations covering 3 different geographical areas with 2 agri-food clusters, one agri-food industry support organisation and 1 agri-food technology centre: the Partnership should reach out to minimum $3 \times 50 = 150$ SMEs).

Each cluster or industry support organisation will then analyse the sustainability improvement potential of those SMEs. For this analysis the partners should, to the extent possible, use the agri-food Code of Conduct webtool¹¹ on the European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP). Partners should also steer to get the SMEs acquainted with and sign-up to the EU Code of Conduct on Responsible Food Business and Marketing Practices. This analysis can be complemented by other types of direct consultation of SMEs.

Each Partnership will select **at least 100 SMEs**, which will be supported by this project, on the basis of the following criteria:

- Correspondence of the potential for sustainability improvements of the SMEs with the priorities of the partnership
- Importance of the sustainability improvement potential

¹⁰ The webtool is currently under preparation.

¹¹ The webtool is currently under preparation.

- Synergies with other companies
- Positive competitiveness impact for the companies
- Impact on food inflation
- Geographical balance in terms of representation of the countries present in the consortium

The selected SMEs will be supported in implementing actions to improve their sustainability performance. It is expected that those SMEs would sign-up to the EU Code of Conduct on Responsible Food Business and Marketing Practices. The Partnerships are also invited to encourage all other SMEs they had reached out to, to sign the Code of Conduct, especially the highly sustainable SMEs which could share their best practices and demonstrate to other SMEs that sustainability and competitiveness improvements can go hand in hand.

Activity 2: Identification and presentation of pre-existing best practices

The Partnerships will reach out to both SMEs and larger agri-food companies in their geographical areas to identify agri-food sustainability best-practices under the different themes of this call for proposals, and especially in the theme(s) for sustainability transition selected by the project.

The partner organisations will encourage and assist those companies to submit their best-practices for their integration in the Green Transition Support Knowledge database, and to sign-up to the EU Code of Conduct on Responsible Food Business and Marketing Practices. The submitted best practices will be validated through the Green Transition Support Knowledge Base procedure and displayed once validated. It is expected that each Partnership should enable the presentation of minimum 10 pre-existing best practices in the database during the first 6 months of its implementation. This would enable the other Partnerships awarded under this call for proposals to take inspiration from those best practices.

Activity 3: Definition of a Common Strategic Agenda

Each Partnership shall develop a Common Strategic Agenda (CSA) and roadmap with Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the implementation of each theme(s) selected by the Partnership and include strategic actions on improving resource efficiency to counter food inflation.

For that purpose, each Partnership will:

- Compile the results of the Code of Conduct Webtool assessment by their SMEs, and present for each action of the Code a summary of the overall situation, challenges, objectives over the long term.
- For each theme(s) for sustainability transition selected, the Partnership will develop a CSA accompanied by a 10-year roadmap for the implementation and by KPIs to monitor the implementation of the C S A.
- The CSA shall include a thorough analysis of the needs and potential to uptake resource-efficiency technologies and deploy renewable energy solutions across their eco-system of companies.

Activity 4: Creating a network of agri-food technology centres

Each Partnership will organise one thematic conference/webinar (at least half a day, either online or hybrid) on one of its selected themes. The objective of those conferences/webinars will be to create a community of the agri-food technology centres across the Partnerships and contribute to capacity building in general through sharing knowledge, experience and best-practices. The attendance of the technology centres participating in the other Partnerships to all conferences/webinars organised by partnerships under this call for proposals is mandatory. All the partners of the other Partnerships awarded under this call for proposals will also be invited.

The conferences/webinars will also be open to all interested clusters outside the Partnerships awarded under this call for proposals, especially to Green Tech Clusters, with the potential to propose innovative and competitive technologies.

The timing of the conferences/webinars will preferably be coordinated between the Partnerships to spread them along the first year of the projects' implementation, in order to enable cooperation between the technology centres during the rest of the project and enable maximum participation.

Each conference/webinar will be organised around a different specific thematic area, which will be one of the theme(s) of the inviting Partnership. The coordination between the Partnerships will aim at avoiding overlaps in content and covering a maximum number of topics.

The Partnerships will consult the Horizon Results Platform¹² to identify technological solutions relevant for the thematic area of the conferences. This platform was specifically designed to disseminate the technological solutions that have been developed with the support of Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe including in the agri-food sector. Corresponding Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe project owners/leaders could be invited to present those relevant solutions.

An invitation to the conference will be posted on the ECCP website minimum 1,5 months before the conference, with the purpose to invite Green-tech clusters and other clusters which commercialised technologies relevant for the respective theme to participate to the conference/webinar and present them.

To support overall networking between the Partnerships and all other agri-food clusters and their eventual technology centres in Europe, all agri-food clusters and agri-food industry support organisations in the Partnerships will have to request registration on the ECCP in the first 6 months of the project.

Activity 5: Appointment of Green Transition Advisors in each agri-food cluster or industry support organisation

The Partnerships will enable sustainability support capacity building of the agri-food clusters and industry support organisations in the projects.

Each technology centre, which shall be the expertise centre(s) for the implementation of the project by the partnership, will appoint at least one specialised expert to provide technological support in this project. Furthermore, each agri-food cluster or industry support organisation will appoint at least one Green Transition Advisor in its

¹²<https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/horizon-results-platform>

organisation. Those experts and advisors must already be working for the existing structures, such as agri-food technology centres, agri-food clusters, or industry support organisations.

Each agri-food technology centre participating in the Partnership will agree to (1) provide sustainability technological advice to the SMEs also of the other partner organisations in its Partnership, either directly or through the local Green Transition Advisors and (2) share expertise and help building sustainability expertise in the other partner organisations in its Partnership, by directly liaising with and teaching their Green Transition Advisors.

The Green Transition Advisors of each partner will directly liaise with the agri-food technology centre(s) of the Partnership to obtain the technological guidance to support their SMEs and develop their own expertise. The Green Transition Advisors will also liaise with the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) sustainability advisor in their geographical area (if there is one), to share expertise and the experience of this project¹³.

In order to raise awareness about the Green Transition Advisors among SMEs, each Green Transition Advisor will reach out to the maximum possible agri-food SMEs in their areas (going even beyond the SMEs identified in the preparation of the project). The Green Transition Advisors should be able to provide general support to all agri-food SMEs (beyond those benefiting from this project) with regard to all the objectives of EU Code of Conduct on Responsible Food Business and Marketing Practices:

- evaluating their sustainability performance based on the objectives of the Code of Conduct
- setting up a pathway for the SME for improving sustainability in one or more of the areas of the Code.

The Green Transition Advisors will provide comprehensive support to the selected SMEs on the specific theme(s) for sustainability transition of the Partnership, preferably collectively (see activity 6), or individually (see activity 7) for agri-food SMEs which cannot or do not wish to be grouped with other SMEs.

The Green Transition Advisors are also invited to liaise with other service providers within the ecosystem, to collaborate with them on SME support, such as:

- European Digital Innovation Hubs specialized in agri-food technologies
- EEN Sector Group Agri-food
- Euroclusters focusing on the agri-food sector.

Activity 6: Collective support actions

The Partnerships and their members will mobilize and support the SMEs selected under activity 1 in their sustainability improvements for collective action under the 3 theme(s) identified, either collectively (preferably) or individually. The grouping of SMEs with similar needs will enable economies of scale and thus lower the costs of the investments in the new technologies. SMEs which cannot be grouped shall nevertheless be supported as indicated under activity 7.

¹³ [Sustainability | Enterprise Europe Network \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu).

For that purpose, the Partnerships will essentially use and develop the resources of their agri-food technology centre(s) and Green Transition Advisors, exploit and develop the Green Transition Support Knowledge hub and database¹⁴, liaise with EEN sustainability advisors¹⁵ in their areas, as well as the Green-tech cluster organisations registered on the ECCP¹⁶ and other clusters with the capacity to provide the necessary technologies for the following actions:

- a. As detailed under activity 1, each Partnership will reach out to the maximum possible agri-food SMEs in their areas to find which ones are interested to evaluate potential improvements in the theme(s) for sustainability transition selected by the partnership.
- b. In the specific case of investments in renewable energy, the sustainability advisers will also reach out to local SMEs in other economic sectors to enable economies of scale, complementarity and joint management, as the deployment of a collective system must be done at regional or national level.
- c. The Partnerships will ask if those SMEs are interested to pool their needs with other SMEs, to encourage collaboration and to enable economies of scale in technology procurement and implementation. SMEs ready to collaborate will have the priority for support. Each partnership will identify among those the SMEs with similar needs and facilitate the pooling of their needs and the deployment of collective investments, with a view to improving the cost-efficiency of the projects and enabling complementarity of renewable energy projects. SMEs which cannot or do not wish to be grouped with other SMEs (also for competitiveness reasons) will get individual support from their Green Transition Advisors (see activity 7).
- d. Each Partnership will have grouped the SMEs they have to support in groups with similar needs. In the next step the Partnerships will define, especially through the agri-food technology centres, the global technical specifications of the sustainability improvement objectives of each group. This should be completed by the end of quarter 5 of the project. When the Partnership has more than one agri-food technology centre, the projects can be split between the technology centres if those are specialised, or the work can be done in collaboration. In each case, the experts in the agri-food technology centre(s) will define those technical specifications in collaboration with the Green Transition Advisors who are in direct contact with the SMEs (see activity 7).
- e. If different Partnerships have identified the same priority areas, they are invited to eventually explore the possibilities to group SMEs between Partnerships.
- f. Each Partnership will publish on the ECCP the specifications of each group of SMEs, to call upon potential technology providers to make proposals. This publication should be done at the latest in quarter 6 of the project.
- g. Each Partnership's agri-food technology centre(s) will pre-identify the best and most competitive technologies for each group of SMEs, with a view to presenting different technological options to each group. The SMEs will then be guided and supported to choose which options they want to explore more precisely.
- h. Each Partnership (business support organisations and/or technology centres) will then refine the specifications of the options chosen and launch a (global) procurement exercise for their SMEs (at the latest in quarter 9 of the project), to obtain budgeted offers for the implementation of the sustainability improvements.
- i. Each Partnership's industry support organisation will help the SMEs to obtain public and private financing for their sustainability improvement projects (at the latest in quarter 9 of the project). The EEN members in the areas will also be mobilised for this purpose.

¹⁴ <https://clustercollaboration.eu/green/database>.

¹⁵ [Sustainability | Enterprise Europe Network \(europa.eu\)](#).

¹⁶ [Homepage | European Cluster Collaboration Platform](#).

- j. The agri-food technology centre(s) and Green Transition Advisors of the partnership should take measures to ensure sustainable technical assistance for the deployment of the technologies to the SMEs, even beyond the duration of the project once the SMEs have decided the investments.

Activity 7: Individual support actions to individual SMEs

With regard to the SMEs selected under activity 1, but which cannot or do not wish to be grouped with other SMEs (see activity 6), the Green Transition Advisors will provide comprehensive individual support on the specific priority areas for sustainability transition of the Partnership, to enable their implementation by those individual SMEs. This comprehensive support will consist in: identifying the best technologies and technology providers, helping the SME to update its business plan for the necessary changes, access to finance, providing or relaying appropriate technological support for the deployment of new production, processing, packaging or logistical methods with new or existing technology, etc.

Activity 8: Communication on the results of the projects and exit strategy

Each Partnership will identify minimum 25 best projects among the SMEs they will have supported to present them as best practices in the Green Transition Support Knowledge Database¹⁷. The submitted best practices will be validated through the Green Transition Support Knowledge Database procedure and published on the ECCP once validated.

A final common online conference will be organised by all Partnerships together (last quarter of the project), where each Partnership will present the 5 best SME sustainability improvements, achieved as a result of activities 6 and 7. The conference is the means to disseminate the outcomes and results of the projects. Other agri-food clusters, industry support organisations, technology centres or companies will also be invited to participate.

All agri-food technology centres of the different Partnerships will commit to continue their collaboration on the exchange of best practices after the end of the project. They are invited to use the agri-food webpage of the ECCP or Green Transition Support to formalise their networking.

The exit strategy of each Partnership will have to explain how the maintenance of long-term expertise in the agri-food clusters or industry support organisations on all the objectives of the EU Code of Conduct on Responsible Food Business and Marketing Practices will be ensured.

Mandatory Deliverables:

The following deliverables are considered as mandatory:

- Catalogue of pre-existing best practices identified (activity 2)
- Catalogue of best practices arising via the SME support (activity 8)
- Conference proceedings of the webinar/conference (activity 4)

¹⁷ <https://clustercollaboration.eu/green/database>.

- Compilation of the results of the Code of Conduct Webtool assessment by the SMEs (activity 3)
- Common Strategic Agenda (CSA) and roadmap with Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the implementation of each theme(s) selected by the partnership and including strategic actions on improving resource efficiency to counter food inflation (activity 3)
- Fiche summarising the support provided to each supported SME (1 page per SME or per group of SMEs; activities 6 and 7)
- 2 Technical Progress Reports not linked to payments¹⁸.

The above list of mandatory deliverables should be complemented by other deliverables proposed by the applicant consortia.

Direct Financial Support to Third parties:

The financial support to third parties can be channelled through:

- Reimbursement of actual costs or lump sums of travel, accommodation and subsistence costs necessary to participate in the scope of the eligible activities listed above. For travelling, greener modes of transport should always be favoured, when possible. Online alternatives of activities are also recommended, when possible.

Proposals must clearly detail:

- the objectives of the support and the reasons why financial support to third parties is needed,
 - the definition of the third parties, which may receive financial support,
 - the criteria for awarding financial support,
 - the results to be obtained and
 - the maximum amount to be granted to each third party.
- In case of a direct financial support to third parties, Partnerships must awarded it on the basis of the conditions described in section 6 below.

Further conditions regarding the above-listed elements or other elements may be laid down in the calls, which Partnerships must publish in order to award the financial support. The beneficiary of the EU grant must ensure that the recipients of the financial support allow the Agency, the Commission, the European Anti-fraud Office (OLAF), the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) and the Court of Auditors to exercise their powers of control on documents, information, even stored on electronic media, or on the final recipient's premises.

¹⁸ Details in section 10 'Reporting and payment arrangements'.

Expected impact

The impact of the mandatory activities listed above must be respectively assessed by each proposal against the following **mandatory Key Performance Indicators**:

1. Number of cluster organisations or business network organisations from different SMP participating countries having benefited from the supported action
2. Number of sustainability investment projects resulting from the supported action
3. Number of SMEs having directly or indirectly benefited from the supported action (mandatory minimum: 100)
4. Number of SMEs signing Code of Conduct as result of the project
5. Number of additional agri-food clusters/ agri-food industry support organisations registered on ECCP as a result of this project
7. Number of pre-existing Best Practices submitted to Green Transition Support Knowledge database and validated (mandatory minimum: 10)
6. Number of best practices created through the SME support provided in this project and added to the Green Transition Support Database (mandatory minimum: 25).

Applicants must include the above indicators and also propose further SMART (i.e. Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timely) indicators. Indicators and targets must be coherent with the proposed activities included in the proposal.

3. Available budget

The available call budget is **EUR 3 000 000**. This budget might be increased by maximum 20%.

We expect to fund between 3 to 5 proposals under this call for proposals.

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:	18 July 2023
<u>Deadline for submission:</u>	<u>7 November 2023 – 17:00:00 CET</u> <u>(Brussels)</u>
Evaluation:	November 2023 – January 2024
Information on evaluation results:	January 2024
GA signature:	May 2024

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/calculator (*template available in the Submission System; Tpl_Detailed Budget Table (SMP COSME GFS 90)*)
 - list of previous projects (key projects for the last 4 years) (*template available in Part B*)
 - Annex 5 to Part B - Eligibility checklist (available at EISMEA's page [here](#)).
 - CVs of core project team: not applicable
 - activity reports of last year: not applicable.


Please note that the amounts encoded in 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 **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

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

Eligible participants (eligible countries)

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

- be legal entities (public or private bodies)
- be established in one of the eligible countries, i.e.:
 - EU Member States (including overseas countries and territories (OCTs))
 - non-EU countries:
 - listed EEA countries and countries associated to the 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](#))
 - Ukraine, as stipulated in the Eligibility criteria section of the SMP Work Programme 2023, Annex 2¹⁹.
- be or represent an agri-food cluster organisation; industry support organisation or agri-food technology centre²⁰.

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*).

Primary agricultural producers and the retail part of the agri-food value-chain are not eligible.

Non-SME agri-food companies in the geographical areas of the partnerships can participate in the project to share their sustainability expertise or participate in common procurement activities, but at their own costs expense. The commitment of non-SME agri-food companies which are officially members of the cluster organisations to supporting the project is encouraged.

¹⁹ Commission Implementing Decision C(2023)-1119 final of 22 February 2023 on the financing 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 and the adoption of the work programme for 2023-2024.

²⁰ **Definitions applicable for this call for proposals:**

- **Agri-food cluster organisation:** dynamic group of agri-food companies and related economic entities active in a specific geographical area, that have reached a sufficient scale to develop specialised expertise, services, resources, suppliers and skills and are already collaborating on innovation or presenting a potential for innovation collaboration; it includes business companies of different size, but also other essential entities of an industrial ecosystem such as research and knowledge institutions, science and technology parks, talents and financial service providers, non-profit organisations, related public bodies.
- **Industry support organisation:** business or technical support organisation with the operational capacity to directly support a large number of agri-food companies in their geographical area.
- **Agri-food technology centre:** technical or technology centres, agronomical institutes, environmental agencies, Digital Innovation Hubs, polytechnic universities or vocational universities; with demonstrated expertise and experience to provide technical guidance to agri-food companies on the best technologies to enable their sustainability transition.

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

International organisations — International organisations are 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 (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)*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).

Following the [Council Implementing Decision \(EU\) 2022/2506](#), as of 16 December 2022, no legal commitments (including the grant agreement itself as well as subcontracts, purchase contracts, financial support to third parties etc.) can be signed with Hungarian public interest trusts established under [Hungarian Act IX of 2021](#) or any entity they maintain. Affected entities may continue to apply to calls for proposals. However, in case the Council measures are not lifted, such entities are not eligible to participate in any funded role (beneficiaries, affiliated entities, subcontractors, recipients of financial support to third parties). In this case, co-applicants will be invited to remove or replace that entity and/or to change its status into associated partner. Tasks and budget may be redistributed accordingly.

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 of 19.07.2013, p. 9-11).

 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 applicants (beneficiaries; not affiliated entities), which complies with the following conditions:

- **minimum 4 legal entities from 3 different eligible countries;**
- the **coordinator** of the consortium must be an **agri-food cluster organisation;**
- in addition to the coordinator **at least 2 other agri-food clusters or industry support organisations;**
- **at least one agri-food technology centre;**
- **Please note: Consortium coordinator can NOT submit more than one proposal under this call.** Multiple proposals from the same consortium coordinator will be rejected;
- Applicants – *other than consortium coordinators* - may participate in more than one proposal under the same call. But if the same applicant is participating in more than one of the proposals selected for a grant, the applicant will be asked to withdraw from all except one of them or the applicant will be rejected from all proposals.

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 will be accepted in projects as defined in section 2.

Your project application must clearly specify why financial support to third parties is needed and how it will be managed. The proposal must also clearly describe the results to be obtained. Geographic location (target countries)

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

Duration

Projects are expected to range normally between 30 and 36 months (extensions are possible, only if duly justified and through an amendment of the Grant agreement).

Project budget

Project budgets (maximum grant amount) are expected to be up to EUR 1 000 000 per project. This does however not preclude the submission/selection of proposals

requesting other amounts. The grant awarded may be lower than the amount requested.

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 responsibilities 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' 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 in Part B (description of the action) of the Application Form via the following information:

- profiles (qualifications and experience) of the staff responsible for managing and implementing the project
- description of the consortium participants
- list of previous projects (key projects for the last 4 years).

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)
- 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:

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

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.

- 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 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) Projects focusing on a theme that is not otherwise covered by higher ranked projects will be considered to have the highest priority.
- 2) The *ex aequo* proposals within the same theme 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'.
- 3) 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.
- 4) After that, the remainder of the available call budget will be used to fund projects across the different themes in order to ensure a balanced spread of the geographical and thematic coverage and while respecting to the maximum possible extent the order of merit based on the evaluation of the award criteria.

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



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.

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

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 project, objectives and planning; extent to which they match the themes and priorities and objectives of the call; contribution to the EU strategic and legislative context; European/transnational dimension; impact/interest for a number of countries (EU or eligible non-EU countries); possibility to use the results in other countries; potential to develop mutual trust/cross-border cooperation (**30 points**).
- **Quality:**
 - **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; cost effectiveness (sufficient/appropriate budget for proper implementation; best value for money) (**30 points**).
 - **Project team and cooperation arrangements:** quality of the consortium and project teams; extent to which the role and contribution of each partner is appropriate and in line with its experience and past activities; appropriate procedures and problem-solving mechanisms for cooperating within the project teams and consortium (**30 points**).
- **Impact:** credibility, ambition and expected long-term impact of results on target groups/general public; appropriate dissemination strategy for ensuring sustainability and long-term impact; sustainability of results after EU funding ends; ambitious, objectively verifiable and achievable key performance indicators to measure project outcomes and expected impact (**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 (i.e. up to the budget ceiling). Other proposals will be rejected.

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

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

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

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

Starting date and project duration

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

Project duration: *see section 6 above*.

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.

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 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 rates fixed in the Grant Agreement (**100%** for the costs for providing financial support to third parties and **90%** for all other costs categories).

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
 - D.1 Financial support to third parties
- 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: allowed for reimbursement of actual costs or lump sums of travel, accommodation and subsistence costs necessary to participate in the scope of the eligible activities listed in section 2.; maximum amount per third party EUR 60 000 unless a higher amount is required because the objective of the action would otherwise be impossible or overly difficult to achieve and this is duly justified in the Application Form.
 - indirect cost flat-rate: 7% of the eligible direct costs (categories A-D, except volunteers costs 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

²⁸ 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).

²⁹ Commission [Decision](#) of 12 July 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 (C(2021)35) **as amended by Commission [Decision](#) C(2023)4928 of 26 July 2023.**

- 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.

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

There will be two Technical Progress Reports covering the first and the third quarter of the project implementation³⁰ not linked to payments .

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.

³⁰ E.g. for a project with a duration of 32 months, the project will have to submit the 1st Technical Progress report covering months 1 to 8 and the 2nd Technical Progress Report covering months 17 to 25.

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
- 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
- additional communication and dissemination activities: Yes

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

- specific rules for PPI Grants for Procurement: No

- specific rules for blending operations: No

Other specificities

n/a

Non-compliance and breach of contract

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

 For more information, see [AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement](#).

11. How to submit an application

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

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

a) create a user account and register your organisation

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

Once you have an 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):

- [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 at the latest 5 working days before the call submission deadline to the following email address: 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** —
Please note: Consortium coordinator can NOT submit more than one proposal under this call. Multiple proposals from the same consortium coordinator will be rejected.

Applicants – other than consortium coordinators - may participate in more than one proposal under the same call. But if the same applicant is participating in more than one of the proposals selected for a grant, the applicant will be asked to withdraw from all except one of them or the applicant will be rejected from all proposals.
- **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 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](#).