



Single Market Programme (SMP COSME)

Call for proposals

Enterprise Europe Network Energy Efficiency Action
(SMP-COSME-2023-EENEE)

Version 1.1
15 May 2023



HISTORY OF CHANGES			
Version	Publication Date	Change	Page
1.0	29.03.2023	▪ Initial version	
1.1	15.05.2023	▪ Section 6 – Clarification of eligibility of applicants being Hungarian public trust entities or entities maintained by them to implement Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/2506 of 15 December 2022 on measures for the protection of the Union budget against breaches of the principles of the rule of law in Hungary	15



EUROPEAN INNOVATION COUNCIL AND SMEs EXECUTIVE AGENCY (EISMEA)

EISMEA.I – Innovation ecosystems, SMP/Entrepreneurship and Consumers
EISMEA.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 market 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-EENEE – ENTERPRISE EUROPE NETWORK ENERGY EFFICIENCY ACTION**

Applicants cannot submit more than one proposal under this call. Multiple proposals will be rejected.

Organisations may not participate in several proposals.

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)

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 Annex II to Commission Implementing Decision [C \(2023\) 1119 final](#) of 22 February 2023 financing of the 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, action 2.5.

- 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

The European Union (EU) is in the process of making a major economic transition towards a greener, more digital and resilient industry. Europe's companies need to become more environmentally, socially and economically sustainable, harness digitalisation and become more resilient to shocks of all kinds. By doing so, they will become more competitive in global markets and will be able to sustain that increased competitiveness in the decades to come.

Recent crises (in particular the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's military aggression of Ukraine) have not only caused supply chain disruptions but have also caused unprecedented pressures on energy prices and supply, thereby highlighting the urgency of this transition. Furthermore, the EU has committed to ambitious emission reduction targets which can only be reached by means of wide-spread increases in energy efficiency and the use of renewable energies.

SMEs will therefore need to become much more energy-efficient and start making the switch to more renewable energy sources, as part of a wider move to more sustainable business models also including the key element of energy efficiency. This will help reduce their energy consumption and costs but also contribute to reducing their environmental impact and help them become more resilient to any further energy market disruptions or price increases.

The Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) is well-placed to help SMEs make this transition. Under the renewed network that came into place in January 2022, the EEN has Sector Groups on Renewable Energies and Energy Intensive Industries, as well as dedicated 'Sustainability Advisors' who offer a suite of services to help SMEs make the transition to more sustainable business models including greater energy efficiency.

Whilst these services are already proving extremely useful, there is benefit in taking a dedicated action to strengthen the support given to SMEs on energy efficiency.

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

Objectives

In line with the objectives of the European Commission's winter energy package³ of July 2022, the RepowerEU Plan⁴ and the forthcoming Net-Zero Industry Act⁵, and in the context set out above, this call for proposals aims at launching a new action to support SMEs in their efforts to improve their energy efficiency including for their buildings, processes and production lines.

The main objective of the action is to strengthen the energy resilience of SMEs through direct financial support for the adoption of technological or non-technological solutions to improve energy efficiency as well as complementary investments in skills and managerial practices.

Such an action will help European SMEs survive the pressures from increased energy prices and disrupted energy supply chains and will increase their long-term sustainability, by reducing their environmental impact and increasing their resilience to any future higher than expected energy price rises or other disruptions.

The secondary objective of the action is to give commercial opportunities to SMEs offering technological or non-technological solutions to energy-efficiency related issues by creating markets to test, commercialise, and deploy such innovative solutions, and connect with other SMEs needing their solutions.

This action is compatible with the following specific objectives of the SMP that aim at strengthening the competitiveness and sustainability of SMEs through measures to:

- Provide energy efficiency support to SMEs thereby fostering their sustainable growth and resilience;
- Facilitate the commercialisation and deployment of innovative technologies for energy reduction in the Single Market;
- Promote a favourable business environment for SMEs, support their transition to more energy-efficient and digital business models and promote new business opportunities for SMEs, especially those offering innovative business models and solutions;
- Support the competitiveness and resilience of industrial ecosystems and sectors, particularly those that are more energy-intensive;
- Promote the modernisation of industry, contributing to a green, digital and resilient economy.

In addition to achieving these objectives, the action will collect information and data to assess its effectiveness, helping to inform future design and implementation of instruments for energy resilience, building upon the existing work of the EEN and notably its new Sustainability Advisors⁶ and its dedicated Sector Groups, in particular

³ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_4608

⁴ https://commission.europa.eu/publications/key-documents-repowerEU_en

⁵ https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/publications/net-zero-industry-act_en

⁶ <https://een.ec.europa.eu/about-enterprise-europe-network/advice-support/sustainability>

on Renewable Energies and on Energy Intensive Industries.

Themes and priorities (scope)

The scope of this call for proposals is to select a consortium formed by EEN organisations (part of EEN consortia with whom EISMEA has an ongoing grant agreement) to identify SMEs among the EEN's client base or new clients of the Network that will benefit from direct financial support to third parties of up to EUR 10 000. The purpose of this support will be to improve the energy efficiency of the SMEs including for their buildings, processes and production lines.

This call for proposals is restricted to members of the EEN, with whom EISMEA has an existing ongoing grant agreement and who have a proven track record of providing services to SMEs relevant to the scope of this call.

The selection of the eligible SMEs will be done through dedicated open and transparent calls organised by the selected consortium in this call. The amounts of the financial support can vary according to the content of the applications received from selected SMEs and the type of supported companies (having already been supported by EEN or not, size of the company, sector of activity, etc.).

The proposals must describe the type of costs the financial support may cover, including (but not exclusively):

- Energy audits and technical consultations (such as energy consultants, energy simulation, etc.);
- Contribution to the adoption of energy-efficient technologies in production lines (both technologies available in the same region or outside the region);
- Contribution to investments to increase the energy efficiency of company facilities in view of reducing their energy demand and consumption;
- Energy performance certificate;
- Implementation of energy management systems and related software;
- Energy trainings for SME employees on energy efficiency best practices and digital tools for energy data analysis;
- Contribution to the installation of renewable energy systems, such as solar panels or wind turbines.

The proposals must describe how the consortium will ensure that the conditions for a Randomised Control Trial-based impact evaluation are met. The Randomised Control Trial (RCT) will be conducted by a separate external entity, in parallel and in close coordination with the selected consortium. Although the RCT-based impact evaluation will be separately funded and executed, the selected consortium will:

- Seek to achieve at least double the demand from eligible SMEs (among the EEN's client base or new clients, all meeting the eligibility and selection criteria) than the available amount of grants. This will allow the consortium to use a randomised selection of final beneficiary SMEs (among the pool of eligible candidates), leading to a comparability between the group(s) of beneficiaries and what could become control group(s) through an experimental impact evaluation;

- Be in charge of data collection regarding both beneficiary firms and control group firms. The design of the activities and the data collection process should meet the pre-requisites of an RCT-based Impact Evaluation. The data collection should ensure no differential attrition across beneficiary firms and control group firms. The follow-up data collection should ensure over 80%, ideally 90%, participation from both beneficiary and control group firms.

Activities that can be funded (scope)

The proposals must explain the method of selecting the SMEs and have to be transparent, open and in line with applicable legislation for public support of economic operators.

The proposals must describe the type of activities for which financial support may be provided to selected SMEs and of which amount.

The proposals must explain how the consortium will carry out the dedicated activities such as:

- The preparation of open and transparent calls to select the SME recipients of direct financial support. Calls issued by the selected consortium must be open to SMEs established in all EU Member States as well as countries associated to the SME pillar of the SMP. However, to ease the implementation of the action, the beneficiary might issue successive calls restricted to certain geographical areas as long as all EU Member States and SMP associated countries are covered by at least one call before the end of the action. An adequate geographical balance of the recipients of financial support must be ensured; The promotion of the calls to SMEs through the most appropriate channels (including through other stakeholder networks to also reach SMEs outside the EEN client base), deploying a very effective outreach campaign that could include: organising awareness-raising sessions with strategic actors; presenting the benefits of participating in the call to SMEs and sectorial organisations; explaining the objectives and conditions for accessing the call, eligible activities and estimated timetable; providing dissemination materials to local partners; producing digital content (videos, images, etc.). These actions will be as comprehensive as possible, so that their messages reach the largest number of potential SME beneficiaries and achieve at least double the demand from eligible SMEs (among the EEN's client base or new clients, all meeting the eligibility and selection criteria) than the available amount of grants;
- The selection of SMEs that will receive direct financial support in a manner that is consistent with a rigorous impact evaluation (i.e. a Randomised Control Trial);
- Collecting data on the implementation and impact of the activities, and the performance of both SME beneficiary and control group SMEs. The design of the data collection protocols to be compatible with an RCT-based impact evaluation is critical and part of the assignment of the consortium, as well as the adequate implementation of these protocols;
- Ensuring suitable links with complementary services (e.g. advisory services, identification of suppliers, partnering services, etc.) linked to energy efficiency by the EEN Sustainability Advisors in the region of the recipients;
- Link supported companies to support services for access to complementary

sources of funding for energy-efficiency investments, either private or public at European, national, regional, or local level;

- The provision of additional services that may be considered as appropriate and complementary to the services already listed above. The consortium should ensure a strong operational link with and involvement of relevant members of the EEN (in particular the sustainability advisers), for example via an advisory board of EEN organisations and/or other methodologies to be outlined by the applicant;
- Generate success stories both from those SMEs developing solutions and those SMEs taking them up.

The companies selected by the consortium for the direct financial support must:

- Be SMEs according to the European Definition of SMEs⁷ and able to demonstrate their SME status with the SME Self-Assessment tool of the European Commission⁸;
- Be established in one of the Member States of the EU or in one of the third countries associated to the SMP;
- Have designed an action plan in cooperation with the EEN consortium in the region where they are based, with a strong sustainability dimension including the energy efficiency measures proposed for funding under this action;
- Have not received funding from any other entity for the activities supported by this action;
- Demonstrate the ability to implement at operational and technical level the planned energy efficiency measures;
- Commit to inform the consortium about how they implemented the support received and its impact (i.e. contribute to success stories);
- Allow for controls and checks by the selected consortium and EISMEA or other competent monitoring bodies.

The consortium will coordinate the activities described above ensuring a fair distribution of the available support to SMEs in the eligible countries. Each eligible country must be represented by at least 2% of applicants, provided that in each eligible country there is at least twice the number of candidates compared to the final number of selected SMEs.

The consortium will be responsible for checking that the measures proposed by eligible SMEs are appropriate for this action and will need to report on the achieved objectives back to the European Commission and EISMEA. The consortium shall monitor the results of the action through a feedback mechanism to be designed and provided by the consortium that will systematically gather data from beneficiaries and control group(s) SMEs and must monitor the quality of the action through random quality checks performed on the SMEs beneficiaries.

⁷ EU Recommendation [2003/361/EC](#)

⁸ <https://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/SME-Wizard>

Expected impact

By helping companies increase the energy efficiency of their facilities, including building, processes or production lines, this action will help reduce the impact of the energy costs on SMEs and will improve their environmental performance. This in turn will help increase their resilience to any future disruptions or higher than expected price increases.

Specifically, the action is expected to deliver at least the following results⁹:

- At least 900 SMEs benefitting from direct financial support of up to EUR 10 000 per SME to increase their energy efficiency;
- At least 20% of SMEs benefitting from the direct financial support must be active in energy intensive industries¹⁰;
- Reduction of 5% of energy consumption per SME recipient and related greenhouse gas emission reduction (based on nationally or regionally available methodologies);
- At least 50% of SMEs benefitting from direct financial support undertook business process innovation tied to technological adoption leading to higher sustainability or digitalisation within the period of implementation of the EU-funded action;
- At least 25% of SMEs benefitting from direct financial support have enhanced their digital skills within the period of implementation of the EU-funded action;
- At least 50% of SMEs benefitting from direct financial support enhanced the sustainability of their overall business model within the period of implementation of the EU funded action.

The results of the project will be evaluated based on the following indicators:

- Number of SMEs benefitting from direct financial support;
- Number of SMEs applying to receive the direct financial support (in line with the RCT-related requirements mentioned above);
- Amount of direct financial support distributed to SMEs;
- Number of success stories submitted. Whilst all SMEs receiving direct financial support under this action will need to document their results, the consortium is expected to select at least 24 success stories to be published in an easily communicable way (e.g., short videos/interviews, infographics).

When preparing the calls, the consortium must take into consideration the above-mentioned objectives. Furthermore, calls issued by the consortium must include an obligation for selected SMEs to advertise/communicate about the EU-supported financial support they receive. The action should therefore have a positive impact on the visibility of EU funding.

⁹ One SME recipient can report several results under this action.

¹⁰ Commission [SWD \(2021\) 351 final](#), Annual Single Market Report 2021, Annex 3, page 120.

3. Available budget

The available call budget is **EUR 10 000 000**. We expect to fund one project under this call.

Of this amount:

- Minimum 90% of the eligible costs must be dedicated to direct financial support to SMEs;
- Up to 10% of the eligible costs may be allocated to operating and administrative costs of the consortium necessary to implement the action (including data collection for RCT-based impact evaluation).

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


4. Timetable and deadlines

Timetable and deadlines (indicative)	
Call opening:	29 March 2023
<u>Deadline for submission:</u>	<u>31 May 2023 – 17:00:00 CET</u> <u>(Brussels)</u>
Evaluation:	June-July 2023
Information on evaluation results:	July 2023
GA signature:	September 2023
Starting date of the project:	1 October 2023

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*)
 - CVs (short outlines) of core project team
 - activity reports of last year: not applicable
 - list of previous projects (key projects for the last 4 years) (*template available in Part B*)
 - project reference number of the current grant agreement with EISMEA for the implementation of an Enterprise Europe Network project.

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

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

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

Proposals are limited to maximum **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 wholly (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 (see the *list of participating countries*¹¹)
- be member of the Enterprise Europe Network 2022-2025 with an ongoing grant agreement signed with the EISMEA.

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 (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 persons¹².

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'¹³.  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).

¹¹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/smp/guidance/list-3rd-country-participation_smp_en.pdf

¹² See Article 197(2)(c) of the EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

¹³ For the definitions, see Articles 187(2) and 197(2)(c) of the EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

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)*¹⁴ and entities covered by Commission Guidelines No [2013/C 205/05](#)¹⁵). 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](#)¹⁶, 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. Tasks and budget may be redistributed accordingly.



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

Consortium composition

Proposals must be submitted by a consortium (beneficiaries; not affiliated entities), which complies with the following conditions:

- minimum 5 entities from 3 different eligible countries;
- maximum 2 entities can be from the same country in one consortium.

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, in particular the Enterprise Europe Network. The complementarities must be described in the project proposals (Part B of the Application Form).

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

Financial support to third parties is allowed under the following conditions:

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

¹⁴ 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](#).

¹⁵ Commission guidelines No [2013/C 205/05](#) on the eligibility of Israeli entities and their activities in the territories occupied by Israel since June 1967 for grants, prizes and financial instruments funded by the EU from 2014 onwards (OJEU C 205 of 19.07.2013, pp. 9-11).

¹⁶ Council Implementing Decision (EU) [2022/2506](#) of 15 December 2022 on measures for the protection of the Union budget against breaches of the principles of the rule of law in Hungary.

- the calls must remain open for at least two months on a continuous basis;
- the outcome of the calls must be published on the participants' websites, including amongst others a description of the energy efficiency measures supported, award dates, and final recipient legal names and countries;
- the calls must have a clear European dimension, i.e. facilitate the adoption of energy efficient solutions by SMEs in Europe.

Eligible SMEs are the SMEs in the EEN's client base or new clients, all meeting the eligibility and selection criteria of the calls outlined above.

The financial support to third parties is limited to a maximum amount of EUR 10 000 per SME selected.

The proposals must clearly specify how the financial support to third parties will be managed and provide a list of the different types of activities for which a third party may receive financial support (taking into account the requirements in section 2 above). 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 should normally last **24 months** (Extensions are possible, only if duly justified and through an amendment).

Project budget

The project budget (maximum grant amount) is expected to reach up to EUR 10 000 000. 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 responsibility for all beneficiaries or joint and several liability of affiliated entities (*see below, section 10*)
 - pre-financing paid in instalments
 - (one or more) pre-financing guarantees (*see below, section 10*)
- or
- propose no pre-financing
 - 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), and experience in successfully completed RCT-based impact evaluations and related data collection exercises.

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:

- profiles (qualifications and experience) of the staff responsible for managing and implementing the project, with one team member having extensive experience in successfully completed RCT-based impact evaluations and related data collection exercises;
- description of the consortium participants;
- list of previous projects (key projects for the last 4 years); and
- have a proven track record of providing services to SMEs relevant to the scope of this call, as set out in the SMP WP.

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 participate¹⁷:

- 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)

¹⁷ 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 misconduct¹⁸ (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 grant⁷)
- 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 that¹⁹:

- 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:

¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ See Article 141 EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

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 topic will be prioritised according to the scores they have been awarded for the award criterion 'Impact'. When these scores are equal, priority will be based on their scores for the criterion 'Relevance'. When these scores are equal, priority will be based on their scores for the criterion 'Quality'.

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 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/trans-national 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); quality of the protocol for the data collection (consistency of the protocol's design with a robust Randomised Control Trial) (**30 points**)
 - **Project team and cooperation arrangements:** quality of the consortium and project teams (including track record of successfully

completed Randomised Control Trial); appropriate procedures and problem-solving mechanisms for cooperating within the project teams and consortium (**30 points**)

- **Impact:** ambition and expected impact of results on target groups/general public; appropriate dissemination strategy for ensuring awareness and adequate participation of the target audience and long-term 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. 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: *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 cost²⁰: Yes
- travel and subsistence unit cost²¹: Yes

²⁰ 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).

- equipment costs: depreciation
- other cost categories:
 - costs for financial support to third parties: allowed maximum amount per third party EUR 10 000, 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
 - 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 **pre-financing** to start working on the project (float of normally **70%** of the maximum grant amount; exceptionally less or no pre-financing). The pre-financing will be paid 30 days from entry into force/10 days before starting date/financial guarantee (if required) — whichever is the latest.

There will be one or more **interim payments** (with 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.

²¹ Commission [Decision](#) 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 (C(2021)35).

Pre-financing guarantees

If a pre-financing 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 pre-financing 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.

Pre-financing 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 pre-financing (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): n/a*

Other specificities

n/a

Non-compliance and breach of contract

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



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

11. How to submit an application

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

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

a) create a user account and register your organisation

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

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

b) submit the proposal

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

Submit your proposal in 3 parts, as follows:

- Part A includes administrative information about the applicant organisations (future coordinator, beneficiaries, affiliated entities and associated partners) and the summarised budget for the proposal. *Fill it in directly online.*
- Part B (description of the action) covers the technical content of the proposal. *Download the mandatory word template from the Submission System, fill it in and upload it as a PDF file.*
- Annexes (*see section 5*). *Upload them as PDF file (single or multiple depending on the slots). Excel upload is sometimes possible, depending on the file type.*

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

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

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

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

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

12. Help

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

- [Online Manual](#)
- 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 not later than 3 working days before the 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** — Applicants cannot submit more than one proposal under this call. Multiple proposals will be rejected.
Organisations may not participate in several 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](#).