Fast Track to Innovation

The Fast Track to Innovation (FTI) is a fully-bottom-up innovation support programme promoting close-to-the-market innovation activities open to industry-driven consortia that can be composed of all types of participants. It can help partners to co-create and test breakthrough products, services or business processes that have the potential to revolutionise existing or create entirely new markets, under the helm of the Enhanced European Innovation Council (EIC) pilot.

The Fast Track to Innovation (FTI) is part of the Enhanced European Innovation Council pilot [1](Enhanced EIC pilot). The Enhanced EIC Pilot will pave the way to a fully-fledged EIC; it builds on the lessons learnt from the previous EIC pilot launched in late 2017. The Enhanced EIC Pilot serves as the umbrella for several EU funding instruments: the SME Instrument: the Fast Track to Innovation (FTI), Future and Emerging Technologies (FET) Open and Horizon Prizes, thus providing a 'one stop shop' for funding of breakthrough, market-creating innovation across the EU.

The Fast Track to Innovation (FTI) provides funding for bottom-up proposals for close-to-market innovation activities in any area of technology or application. This thematic openness – combined with the possibility for all kinds of innovation actors to work together and deliver innovation onto the market and/or into society – is set to nurture trans-disciplinary and cross-sectoral cooperation.

The FTI’s aim is to:

- reduce time from idea to market,
- stimulate the participation of first-time applicants to EU research and innovation funding, and
- increase private sector investment in research and innovation.

Who can participate in the FTI?

Proposals for funding must be submitted by consortia comprising between three and five legal entities established in at least three different EU Member States or countries associated to Horizon 2020 [2]. Actions are to be ‘business-driven’ because they are intended to give breakthrough innovation ideas the last push before shaking up the market. Substantial industry involvement in FTI actions is mandatory to ensure quick market take-up (‘quick’ meaning within a three-year period after the start of the FTI-action). This industry involvement implies:

- either the allocation of at least 60% of the budget to industry participants in the consortium,
- or the presence of a minimum number of two industry participants in a consortium of three or four partners, or of three industry participants in a consortium of five partners.
How is the FTI implemented?

The EIC FTI is implemented as a call for proposals running in 2018-2020 on a total budget of €300 million (€100 million per year); its budget is derived from the Horizon 2020 priority “Societal Challenges [3]” and the specific objective “Leadership in Enabling and Industrial Technologies (LEITs) [4]”. The call opens on 7 November 2017 and will be continuously open until 27 October 2020. Proposals are evaluated and ranked and funding decisions taken after three cut-off dates each year.

Proposals are built on a business plan, and focus foremost on achieving high impact: a high degree of novelty comes with a high chance of either success or failure.

Time-to-grant for participants is targeted to be six months at most. As for other innovation actions, EU funding levels are fixed at 70% of the eligible costs. The maximum EU contribution per action amounts to EUR 3 million.

Roots of the FTI?

The FTI is the successor of the FTI Pilot (2015-2016), which was positively assessed during a first study evaluating the response to the call [5]. The pilot scheme was open to applications from January 6, 2015 until October 25, 2016, and had six cut-off dates total.

On average, there were about 333 proposals per cut-off date in 2015-2016. Less than 5% (15-16 proposals) per cut-off date were selected for funding. The majority of the proposals selected for funding at the 2016 cut-off dates were resubmissions. Of the 1994 eligible proposals, a total of 94 got funded in either 2015 or 2016.

More Information

The FTI is implemented by the Executive Agency for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, which on its website features a specific page [6] on this initiative.


Links:
EASME page on the FTI [8]
Assessment of the 2015 Response to the FTI Pilot Call [5]