Acquisition by the EIC Fund of services from a Pilot-AI based fully automated system to provide better guidance and support to applicants, and enhance the evaluation, selection and project management processes of the European Innovation Council under Horizon Europe (2021-2027)

Phase 1 (Pilot Phase)

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

ANNEX 1

I- INTRODUCTION

Over the last years, the continuous progress in Artificial Intelligence (AI) combined with enhanced capacities to manage and analyse big data, has developed possibilities for organizations to make more informed decisions.

With reference to challenges to be tackled by the future European Innovation Council (EIC) to be established by the European Commission under Horizon Europe, the future Framework programme for research, technological development and innovation of the European Union (2021-2027), AI-based fully automated systems could enhance its capabilities to better guide and support innovators among European but also alternate funding possibilities, enhance the overall quality of proposals and reinforce evaluation processes.

The European Commission is currently implementing a Pilot of the future EIC (Enhanced EIC Pilot), under Horizon 2020, the current Framework programme for research and technological development and innovation (2014-2020). In this context, it has already established the EIC Fund (the Contracting Authority), which is tasked of channelling to EIC beneficiaries the reimbursable component of the support awarded under the Enhanced EIC Pilot and, in the future, by the EIC.

In order to explore and ascertain the possibility to launch such an ambitious action under the EIC, the Contracting Authority intends to acquire from a service provider (the Provider) access to the services of an AI-based automated system (the Tool) to support innovators when applying for funding and the evaluation of their proposals by the Commission and the Contracting Authority. Whether based on existing system adjusted to the needs or newly fully developed, or a combination of both, the Tool is expected to offer the following services:

- Service 1 – Orient the applicant among relevant European, national and regional funding opportunities (including private ones) based in particular on data made public or provided specifically by the relevant authorities, in addition to any relevant data owned or accessed to by the Provider. Such an orientation should be
qualitative, that is assess the pertinence of each available funding opportunity in relation to the idea and the objectives of the proposal of the applicant;

- Service 2 – Assist the applicant in turning their idea into a project, through an integrated step-by-step methodology, with guidance and some limited qualitative feedback;

- Service 3 – Generate a fit-for purpose draft EIC proposal (the Form B), out of the collected structured data and the developed project under 2, for the proposer to submit it to the European Commission via its submission tools and process (Funding and tenders Portal) or via the Tool, whichever solution finally retained;

- Service 4 – A built-in evaluation module:
  4.a - providing in-depth data analysis and qualitative assessment to the European Commission in support of its evaluation of individual proposals.
  4.b - recording and embedding individual evaluators and jury comments and assessments in the corresponding sections of the proposal, and any additional services the Provider might offer based on his knowledge of innovation policies and programmes.

All data collected from applicants and the European Commission and the Contracting Authority shall remain their sole property, although the Provider will be authorised to use anonymised data for statistical analysis and machine learning purposes. Such data will be transferred upon request to the Contracting Authority, under agreed models and formats allowing for automated upload into its own databases.

As a pilot phase to assess feasibility and quality of the expected outputs, the Contracting Authority intends to acquire the services of the Tool in support of the first Accelerator call of the EIC in 2021. Services 1, 2 and 3 should be made available for testing and subsequent deployment at the latest by the 30th of November 2020; Service 4 by the 15th of December 2020.

Should the pilot phase prove successful, the European Commission and/or the Contracting Authority may consider acquiring access to more ambitious services for all EIC Pathfinder and Accelerator calls under Horizon Europe, offering additional features to existing services and new ones, such as:

- Under Service 2, allowing applicants to connect and share their data with investors vetted by the European Commission and/or the Contracting Authority, as under potential future Service 5 (see below);
- Integrating some selected features of Service 4.a into Service 2, as part of the qualitative feedback provided to applicants;
- Expanding Service3 to other interested European, national and regional funding authorities, under financial modalities to be agreed with these;
- Expanding Service 4 features to run some elements of pre-due diligence on equity valuation and other relevant aspects;
- Developing a 5th Service covering project negotiation, support to due diligence and market testing;
- Developing a 6th Service covering portfolio constitution, monitoring and management.

II – HORIZON EUROPE AND THE EIC

In view of the future European Parliament and Council regulation establishing Horizon Europe for the period 2021-2027, the Contracting Authority has started to implement the EIC-Pilot to develop a full-fledged EIC in view of its establishment of 2021.

It is in this context that it the Contracting Authority seeks to acquire services from the Tool, under a pilot phase for the first Accelerator call in 2021. Some of the operational features described in Section III are still in development and may hence evolve. It is thus important for the Provider to familiarize with the EIC as a whole, its underlying objectives and management principles, in order to anticipate such changes and propose to provide additional functionalities if and where fit for purpose. It will also allow the provider to prepare the additional services the European Commission and/or the Contracting Authority may decide to acquire should this pilot prove successful.

The EIC will act as the one-stop-shop for all types of innovators, from individuals to universities, research organisations and companies (SMEs, including start-ups, and under certain conditions small mid-caps). Depending of its schemes, it will provide support to single beneficiaries or multi-disciplinary consortia. Its major objectives are:

- To identify, develop and deploy high risk innovations of all kinds, including incremental but with a strong focus on breakthrough, disruptive and deep-tech innovations that have the potential to become market-creating innovations, and
- To support the rapid scale-up of innovative companies mainly SMEs, including start-ups and in exceptional cases small mid-caps, at EU and international levels along the pathway from ideas to market.

The EIC will be implemented primarily through two complementary types of action, namely the Pathfinder for advanced research, for the early stages of technology development, and the Accelerator, for innovation and market deployment actions, including the pre-mass commercialisation stages and company growth.

These two complementary types of actions will share common characteristics. They will:

- Support high-risk innovations where the risks, whether financial, technological/scientific, market and/or regulatory, cannot be borne by the market alone or yet supported by financial instruments under InvestEU;
- Mainly focus on high-risk breakthrough, and/or deep-tech innovations, while also supporting other forms of innovation, including incremental, that have the potential to
create new markets or contribute to resolving global challenges, including “social innovation”;

- Be mainly bottom-up, open to innovations from all fields of science, technology and applications in any sector, while also enabling targeted support for emerging breakthrough, market-creating and/or deep-tech technologies of potential strategic significance in terms of economic and/or social impact.

- Encourage innovations that cut across different scientific, technological (e.g. combining physical and digital) fields and sectors;

- Be centred on innovators, simplifying procedures and administrative requirements, making use of interviews to help assess applications, and ensuring fast decision making;

- Implemented with the aim of significantly enhancing the European innovation ecosystems landscape, of which the EIC is part of;

- Be managed pro-actively with milestones or other predefined criteria to gauge progress and the possibility to, after a thorough assessment, with the possible use of independent experts, reorient, reschedule or terminate the projects where needed.

As well as financial support, innovators will have access to EIC business advisory services providing coaching, mentoring and technical assistance, and pairing innovators with peers, industrial partners and investors. Innovators will also have facilitated access to expertise, facilities (including innovation hubs and open innovation testbeds) and partners from across EU supported activities, such as the Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) and InvestEU, to deliver complementarity and synergies.

To allow the strengthening of the European innovation ecosystem, particular attention will be paid to ensuring proper and efficient complementarity with individual or networked Member States or interregional initiatives, including in the form of a European Partnership.

II.1 – The Pathfinder for Advanced Research (TRL 1 to 6)

The Pathfinder's will provide grants to high-risk cutting-edge projects exploring new and deep-tech areas aiming to develop into potentially radical innovative technologies of the future and new market opportunities. It will build on the experience from the Future and Emerging Technology (FET) schemes supported under FP7 and Horizon 2020, including the Horizon 2020 FET-Innovation Launchpad, as well as the Horizon 2020 SME Instrument Phase 1.

The Pathfinder overall objective will be to nurture potential market creating innovation out of breakthrough ideas and bring them to demonstration stage or development of business cases or strategies for further take-up by the Accelerator or any other market deployment solution.

The Pathfinder will be open to all types of innovators, from individuals to universities, research organisations and all companies, in particular start-ups and SMEs, with a focus on multi-disciplinary consortia. In the case of single beneficiary projects, only individuals, start-ups and SMEs will be eligible.
II.1.a – Pathfinder research and innovation projects (TRL 1 to 4)

The Pathfinder will support through grants the earliest stages of scientific and technological research and development, including proof of concept and prototypes for technology validation.

In order to be fully open to broad-sweeping explorations, opportunities of serendipity and unexpected ideas, concepts and discoveries, the Pathfinder will be mainly implemented through a continuous and competitive open call with cut-off dates for bottom-up proposals. While maintaining its mainly bottom-up nature, the Pathfinder will also provide for competitive challenges to develop key strategic objectives calling for deep-tech and radical thinking.

Regrouping of selected projects into thematic or objective driven portfolios will allow establishing critical mass of efforts and structuring new multidisciplinary research communities. These portfolios will be further developed and enhanced, each along a vision developed with their innovators, but also shared with the research and innovation community at large.

II.1.b - The Pathfinder's Transition activities (TRL 3 to 6)

These activities will be implemented to help researchers and innovators develop the pathway to commercial development for results out Pathfinder research and innovation projects, such as demonstration activities and feasibility studies to assess potential business cases and support the creation of spin offs and start-ups.

These Pathfinder's Transition activities may also consist of complementary grants to top-up or enlarge the scope of previous and on-going Pathfinder actions, to bring in new partners, to enable collaboration within the portfolio and to develop its multidisciplinary community.

II.2 – The Accelerator (TRL 5/6 to 9)

Available private and corporate financing remains scarce between late stage of research and innovation activities and market take-up for high-risk breakthrough and market-creating innovations. Combined scientific/technological risks, management/financial risks, market/economical risks and even regulatory risks affect their attractiveness for investors, depriving Europe from innovations that are key to its future growth.

In order to bridge the 'valley of death' for any type of high-risk innovations, including in particular but not only breakthrough and 'deep tech' innovations, public support must develop a radically new approach. Where the market does not provide viable financial solutions, public support should provide for a specific risk-sharing mechanism, bearing more if not all of the initial risk of potential breakthrough market-creating innovations to attract alternate private investors in a second stage, as operations unfold and the risk is reduced until the company carrying the innovative project becomes bankable.

Consequently, the Accelerator will provide financial support to SMEs including start-ups and, in exceptional cases and for scale-up purpose only, small mid-caps. Beneficiaries must have the
ambition to develop and deploy in EU and international markets their innovations, in particular but not only breakthrough ones, and to scale up rapidly. For that purpose, it will build on the experience from the Phases 2 and 3 of Horizon 2020 SME Instrument and from Horizon 2020 InnovFin, including through the addition of non-grant components and the ability to support larger and longer investments.

The Accelerator shall provide support in the form of EIC blended finance, a mix of:

- a "grant or reimbursable advance" component, to cover innovation activities (TRL 5/6 to 8). The "grant" component will be similar to a normal grant, that is a reimbursement of up to 70% of the eligible costs incurred by the beneficiary. As an alternative to the "grant" component although based on the same method of calculation, when risk is deemed lower than average, a “reimbursable advance” component shall be awarded, to be paid back to the EU on an agreed schedule as an interest-free loan. In case the beneficiary is not able to reimburse, but can continue its activity, the reimbursable advance shall be transformed into equity. In case of bankruptcy, the reimbursable advance will become a grant.

- an “investment” component (equity, guarantees for loans/investors, etc.), to complement support to innovation activities (the co-financed part) and provide for effective market deployment, including scale-up (TRL 5/6 to 9).

The combination and volume of financing, which is not limited, will be adapted to the needs of the firm, its size and stage, the nature of the technology/innovation and the length of the innovation cycle.

Provided that they have the demonstrated capacity or willingness to deploy to market and scale-up, and in particular but not only for incremental innovations, SMEs including start-ups may apply for a support strictly limited at first to a 2.5 million Euro “grant” component, with the possibility to request during implementation an “investment” component taking then the exclusive form of equity.

The Accelerator will also allow for take-up of innovations stemming from Pathfinder projects, from other projects and activities supported by Horizon Europe and from selected National programmes, in order to support them to reach the market.

The Accelerator will mainly operate through a continuously open, and bottom-up call, with regular cut-off dates. While maintaining the predominantly bottom up nature of the Accelerator, these cut-offs may be complemented by targeted ones, to support emerging breakthrough, market-creating and/or deep-tech innovations of potential strategic significance in terms of economic and/or social impact.

Support will be awarded through a single process and with a single decision, providing any selected innovator with a single global commitment to financial resources covering the various stages of innovation down to market deployment including pre-mass commercialisation.
The full implementation of the awarded support will be subject to milestones and regular review.

II.3 – The European innovation ecosystems landscape

Distinct from the EIC although the later will partake in these activities, Horizon Europe provides for various initiatives in order to enhance the European ecosystems of innovation and improve the environment within which innovation can flourish at all levels. The European Commission will encourage cooperation, networking, and the exchange of ideas and knowledge among national, regional and local innovation ecosystems, public and private, in order to support all types of innovation, reach out to all innovators across the EU and provide them with adequate support.

Among these activities, Horizon Europe provides for enhanced coordination between European, national and regional innovation programmes and innovation activities to stimulate operational synergies and avoid overlaps, by sharing data on programmes and their implementation, resources and expertise, analysis and monitoring of technological and innovation trends, interconnecting respective innovators' communities.

In this context, would the Tool prove successful in providing high quality support to innovators in developing their projects, the Contracting Authority would propose other funding authorities to open its use to their own activities, in order to enhance their capabilities to detect and attract proposals and to establish an effective level playing field among European innovators. This would entail the above-mentioned extension of service 3, under financial condition to be agreed between the Contracting Authority, interested funding authorities and the Provider.

III – Designing the Tool

III.1 – General conditions

The object of the present Call for Expression of Interest is to provide access to a computer platform accessible online and made available to the Contracting Authority in the form of a software service solution ("Software as a service") for the purpose of the Accelerator continuous call and cut-off dates of EIC in 2021.

The service provided by the Tool should be designed in relation to processes described under Section III.2. The Provider should be ready to adapt it to any subsequent change should the pilot phase prove successful and the Contracting Authority agree to extend the service, as described under Section I.
Functionalities offered by the Tool should be non-conclusive and holistic, that is inform, guide and advise users, including the European Commission and the Contracting Authority, but leave any decision to them at any stage (overriding principle).

The Contracting Authority does not prescribe any technological specification for the Tool. All the latest and most advanced new technological resources, and in particular those relating to artificial intelligence, are welcome as a decision-making aid for applicants, evaluators, EIC Programme managers, decision makers. Analyses should be provided by the Tool and with no human intervention in almost real time, based on data input by applicants.

The Provider will be asked to complete its database with a questionnaire to collect relevant information on European and other funding programmes. The Provider will need to demonstrate an ability to quickly process and integrate all of this data, if and once made accessible to him.

The proposed service must be accessible via personal pre-registration and available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, except in the case of maintenance, corrections or evolution of the tool. The Contracting Authority and the Provider shall agree on clear maintenance conditions.

Any user of any kind must create a personal nominative account. For security and data protection reasons, it is not permitted to use the account of another user.

The Provider will also have to offer assistance to applicants in the form of Frequently Asked Questions or/and problem-solving tickets (by email or other equivalent system).

The Tool must be presented in English. Ideally, it should be based on natural language processing technologies to simplify its use by applicants.

The data must be hosted in Europe.

The Tool should have a high level of security with regard to the data and should be GDPR Compliant. It must allow a differentiated management of access rights according to the role of the partaking stakeholders (applicants, evaluators, EIC Programme managers, decision-makers).

The Provider retains full ownership of all software and data pre-existing or acquired/developed during the execution of this service, with the exception of software and data supplied to him by the Contracting Authority in the context of this Call for Expression of Interest and of data provided by applicants.

Both the Contracting Authority and the applicants will, as needed, grant to the Provider a non-exclusive, worldwide, free and non-transferable license to collect, use, analyze, host, cache, copy and display all necessary data as part of its services to provide them with the results they are looking for. The Provider undertakes not to transfer any data for commercial purposes to a third party. Both the Contracting Authority and the applicants will declare and guarantee that they have all the necessary authorizations to use the data within the framework of the services and guarantee the Provider of all the consequences which could result from it.

The Provider undertakes to respect the Data Privacy Regulation.
III. 2 – EIC Accelerator Evaluation and Selection process

The Accelerator builds on the SME Instrument phase 2 (SMEI2) under Horizon 2020, the current Framework programme for research and technological development (2014-2020). It aims to support the best deep tech, high-risk and high scale-up potential companies.

However, by integrating in its scope initial market deployment (TRL9) and providing blended finance to beneficiaries, even when it takes the form of a “grant only or first”, the EIC Accelerator calls for another management approach. Drawing from the accumulated experiences and external inputs, the evaluation and selection process will be based on the following principles:

- Timeliness: provide a quicker and more efficient screening of proposals and on a “just in time basis”, through a continuously open call allowing innovators to submit their ideas whenever they wish.
- Support services for innovators: help applicants to further develop and improve their initial idea and proposal along the overall process;
- Enhance the quality of evaluation: limit resubmissions of rejected proposals, to reduce the number of proposals submitted for evaluation over time, hence allowing more evaluation time per proposal
- Reward effort: create a “second chance” for very good to excellent proposals failing to get funding by a very narrow margin.
- Encourage radical ideas and risk-taking attitude: avoid forcing consensus between experts, allow dissent. Choices made during the various stages of the evaluation process are also subjective, and this has to be acknowledged.
- Enhance transparency: provide detailed and fit for purpose feedback to rejected applicants
- Promote innovativeness and disruptiveness: set-up an ambitious Artificial Intelligence-based submission and evaluation tool to support these objectives (The Tool).

At the date of this Call for Expression of Interest and subject to final decision, the Contracting Authority envisages to design the Accelerator evaluation and selection process into 4 steps, with a build-in “2 stages evaluation”.

III.2.a – Step 1: screening of ideas

The first step of the process will consist of a mandatory\(^1\) 1st stage evaluation based on a non-competitive continuously open call. Applicants may submit proposal at any time, when they see it fit and necessary.

\(^1\) Where the granularity of the topic justifies it, the work programme would skip this first step and stage for top-down calls
The aim is to filter a large number of proposals, based on evaluation policy/orientations, in order to limit the burden of heavy application for innovators and to identify those proposals that have a more than reasonable chance to be supported at the end of the process.

As further detailed in Section III.2, any applicant should have access to Tool to check the relevance of her/is idea with regard to Accelerator objectives, types of support, but also past and on-going projects supported, and alternate funding opportunities (other Horizon Europe calls, and calls from accessible and participating national programmes). The applicant will retain full responsibility to submit or not a 1st stage proposal for the Accelerator.

Initial proposals will focus on presenting the idea, mainly by describing its potential impacts and the quality/commitment of the team. Each applicant will submit:

- A five-pager with a description of the proposed innovation, to be drafted and encoded in the Tool, including “a written pitch” addressing a number of mandatory questions derived from DARPA’s Heilmeier Catechism\(^2\) (to be made available to the Provider). This document will be developed through the AI Tool.
- A pitch deck of maximum 10 slides in pdf format.
- A video pitch of maximum 3 minutes performed by the innovator and/or the CEO of the applicant company (format and constraints to be discussed).

Proposals will be screened on a “first-arrived first-assessed” basis, that is on their sole individual merits. Scoring will be limited to “GO or NO GO”, with no comparative ranking.

Two remote experts, acting independently (no consensus process), will perform the screening based on the excellence of the idea (innovativeness, no in-depth S/T assessment), its potential impact on the market (potential business case, no in-depth market assessment) and the team (motivation, key team members in place or still required).

When the two experts disagree (1 GO, 1 NO GO), the proposal will be sent for decision to another referral, whether a jury or 2additonal experts, returning a final GO or NO GO decision.

NO-GO proposals will be rejected. GO proposals will be invited to submit a full proposal to any second stage cut-offs within the next 12 months.

### III.2.b – Step 2: developing and idea into a full proposal

“GO” applicants (and applicants to top-down calls where the 1st step would not be made mandatory) will be provided support to further develop their idea into a proposal. In addition to vouchers to use coaching from the Business Acceleration Services to assist them in the development of their project and the drafting of their proposal, they will be given access:

- to service 2 of the Tool to develop their idea into a detailed budgeted project, based on a built-in methodology. Whilst the methodology should rely on budgeted work-package to calculate the requested support, applicants will also be requested to propose a limited number of significant milestones and their corresponding instalments.

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The proposal will also include description of and milestones for market deployment related activities:
- in parallel to innovation activities for applicants requesting a “grant only or first”, and a simple description for those taking place after;
- in parallel to and after innovation activities for applicants requesting full blended finance
  • to service 3 of the Tool, to produce draft forms for the call.
  Applicants will retain full responsibility for the editing these, drafting the final version of the proposal and submitting it.

The Tool will provide applicants with some self-checks and pre-assessment results. Under service 4, these results will be also included in the data and AI-based indicators (related scientific publications, existing patents, disruptiveness of the innovation, etc.) to be made available to the Contracting Authority to ease and guide its assessment.

Should the Contracting Authority expand its acquisition as detailed under Section I, it is expected that:

• in addition to processing the usual financial ratio, the Tool could over time and as part as service 4 run some elements of pre-due diligence on equity valuation and other relevant aspects, based on data provided by the applicant and methodologies to be further developed and agreed with the Contracting Authority.

• in the context of service 2, the Tool should provide for applicants to connect and share data with potential investors vetted by the Contracting Authority.

**III.2.c – Step 3: evaluation of final proposal**

This third step consists in the second stage of the evaluation process.

Go applicants will be invited to submit their proposal developed under step 2 to a second stage competitive cut-off date within 12 months. It is expected that there should be 4 cut-off dates per year, except in 2021 where there should be only 3.

Each application is evaluated remotely by a panel of two experts, based on Excellence, Impact and Implementation and Financial risk. No consensus will be requested. In case of one GO and one NO GO, the application will be rejected. For applications based on novel science or technology, Excellence will be assessed by one or more leading or specialized expert(s).

Proposals passing all three thresholds will be considered “GO” proposals, below threshold being considered as “NO GO” and rejected. Their applicants will not be allowed to resubmit for the following 12 months, and only with a new or significantly different idea and subject to Step 1.

Applicants of GO proposals will be interviewed by a jury. They will deliver a 10 minutes pitch followed by 30 minutes Q&A. Representatives from the EIC Fund (ideally members of its Investment committee) and EIC Programme Managers will be entitled to participate in the interviews and post-interview deliberations, but with no voting rights, to highlight investments and financial issues, and relevance of the proposal to priorities or other projects in the area.
The Jury will recommend proposals to select and fund.

For proposals rejected, these will be allocated between 3 categories:

- “second chance proposals” in duly justified cases, possibility to resubmit to one of the next 3 second stage cut-offs and with additional days of coaching;
- “Seal of Excellence proposals” with the condition that the applicant has initially accepted for his/her data to be made directly available to relevant national/regional funding authorities. No submission allowed for 12 months, when the applicant may only submit a new/ significantly different idea, subject to Step 1 screening;
- “rejected proposals”. No submission allowed for 12 months, when the applicant may only submit a new/ significantly different idea and subject to Step 1 screening;

Extended ESRs with Jury comments and remote evaluators’ individual assessments, detailing weaknesses and strengths of the proposals will be sent to applicants (especially useful for “second chance proposals”). In the case of proposals rejected, ESR should clearly explain detail the rationale.

**III.2.d – Step4: contract negotiation**

This step should not be covered by the Tool under this Pilot phase. However, the following elements should nonetheless be taken into account in case of extension, as detailed under Section I.

Due to the “partnership” nature of Accelerator projects and the envisaged pro-active management, it is expected that Jury may make important recommendations that will need to be agreed with applicants and reflected in contracts. Additionally, for “full blended finance proposals”, discussing an equity investment – in particular if other investors join in– or a guaranteed loan will entail further and longer discussion and compromise, which may lead to important adjustments of the initially planned activities.

Meetings between beneficiaries and POs, and where appropriate EIC Fund managers, may be organised during negotiation. Costs will covered retroactively by the signed Contract, as for any subsequent meetings with EIC Fund representatives for beneficiaries awarded “full blended finance”.

A preliminary contract covering the “grant or reimbursable advance” component should however be concluded within short delays, based on the planning/milestones included the proposal and as revised/validated by the Jury, and a first instalment paid. This contract will be in force on a temporary basis as negotiation of the equity/guarantee component will continue:

- the contract will be subject to the conclusion of the equity/guarantee agreement. Failure to conclude that agreement may lead to terminate the contract, depending on the nature of the failure and the S/T interest of the Union;
- the contract will be automatically modified to integrate any change therein, in particular milestones and related activities and budget.

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3 Any Jury member will be authorised to provide a dissenting opinion
In the particular case of “grant first” projects, where there are initially not enough resources and/or investors to provide for the missing 30% and TRL9 activities, the list of milestones should include one at mid-term or 6 months before its end to assess the maturity of the innovation and agree on a possible follow-on equity investment.

III.3 – Required Services

III.3.1 – Service 1 – Orientation

This module should allow any innovator to identify all available funding opportunities, whatever their origin (European, national, regional, public and private) and nature (grant, blended finance, loans, equity, guarantee) and provide them access or links to these. This entails the capacity of the Provider to access, assess and manipulate all relevant data, either made public or directly and specifically provided to him by funding authorities throughout Europe.

Orientations to applicant should include:

- primary identification of funding opportunities based on idea/objective, free keywords, country, region, type of research, type of legal entity. Ideally, the service should alert the applicant of any area forbidden to support;

- refined and qualitative orientation (pertinence) based on an additional questionnaire, type of funding sought, …

- Any additional functionalities the Provider might offer based on his knowledge of innovation policies and programmes.

The Provider must be able to enrich its database in a timely manner with any relevant data made available by funding authorities under structured and exploitable format, in particular Horizon Europe data available from 2021 onwards.

Orientations proposed to applicants should be based on their data, collected through questionnaires developed by the Provider. Additionally, any applicant should also have the possibility to submit online any document (pdf or equivalent format) for automatic processing to fine-tune the analysis.

Orientations proposed to applicants must be based on the most objective analysis of the data available as well as on their processing, demonstrating the Provider's knowledge of European and national funding policies and programmes. Orientations must also be easy for applicants to understand, so that they can freely opt for what they consider to be the most appropriate source(s) of funding.

III.3.2 – Service 2 – Turning idea into project
The Tool should provide proposers with appropriate service for designing an innovation and market deployment project, based on proven methodologies.

The aim is to help an applicant to move from the expression of an idea of product/service/process with market value, into a fully described project, by offering pedagogical guidance, explanations and step-by-step method to develop an implementation plan with all its necessary components.

The Tool could also provide the applicant with some automatic analyses of its data input, allowing iterative project design.

As an option, the Provider could also offer a partner search functionality to assist the leader in forming a potential consortium, based on applicant’s data analysis (authors of related scientific publications, owner of related patents, partners from related past and on-going projects, etc.). To this end, the EIC could provide the supplier with a list of all previous applicants to framework programmes calls, including for rejected proposals, and of members of future members EIC communities.

III.3.3 – Service 3 – Generation of a pro-format EIC proposal

The Tool should generate a fit-for-purpose draft proposal (Form B) adapted to the call, based on the structured data collected through the development of the project.

The proposal generation service should also include useful recommendations and guidance for the final drafting of the submission form, left to the sole responsibility of the applicant. However, once the form is validated by the applicant, the Tool shall produce an unmodifiable version for submission via the Funding and tenders Portal and warn the applicant that this version and none other shall be evaluated.

The Provider will have to show flexibility and undertake to make the necessary adaptations to any changes in the EIC proposal form, subject to agreement with the Contracting Authority.

III.3.4 – Service 4 – Evaluation

III.3.4.a. Qualitative feed-back to the Contracting Authority

The Tool is expected to provide for each proposal to be evaluated with in depth assessment of hidden patterns and unknown correlation between technological leads, market trends and customer preferences. The Tool is expected to dig in past and running projects (supported by the European Union and from other funding authorities), scientific publications, IP patents, market analysis and any other relevant data or sources of information, whether made public by their owners or specifically available to the Provider.

Such assessment in support of its evaluation is expected to significantly enhance the Contracting Authority’s (European Commission’s) capabilities to detect potential disruptive
or market-creative innovation among proposals submitted for funding, and qualitatively enhance their technological validation, which is key for innovators and investors.

Per individual proposal, based on data collected, the Tool should provide the following **required** feedback to the Contacting Authority (European Commission):

- In relation to the overall objectives of the project and/or per work-package, the list of pertinent scientific publications, patents, market analysis/expectations and projects previously financed by the Contracting authority and, any other funding authority whose data is made available.
- Identification of the potential markets of the technology to be developed and/or the competitive environment of the proposed innovation
- « RL family » assessment and classification (TRL, IRL, MRL,…)
- Possible identification and pre-classification (incremental or disruptive) of the proposed innovation, whether technological (e.g. breakthrough innovation based on scientific publication and patent comparison) or idea-based (market creating innovation, radical thinking as to the use of existing technology based on market assessment)
- Degree of compatibility with European Union policies as documented by its public reports, Communications…
- Interrelation between proposals submitted, potential emerging portfolios and their indicative roadmap
- Risk profile: technological, market, and societal.

The following **optional** feedback would be considered also by the Contacting Authority

- Provide data to allow the contracting Authority to conduct pre-due diligence, based on data provided by the applicant (usual financial ratios, discounted cash flow, financial projections, valuation of the company),
- any additional functionalities the Provider might offer based on his knowledge of project evaluation and management.

Thanks to artificial intelligence, the analyses carried out should not represent any additional workload for either the applicant (other than the data needed to benefit from services 1 to 3) or the evaluators and EIC programme managers.

In order to provide high qualitative detailed feedback, the tool will have to be able to connect to any non-public database that the Contracting Authority could put at its disposal (projects, patents, scientific publications, market studies, etc.) in order to enrich the analysis.

As a decision-support tool, these outputs should not be conclusive, but should provide evaluators and EIC programme managers with objective data-based analyses in support of their tasks.

Should the Tool prove successful, the Contracting Authority could in 2021 acquire access of applicants to some of these features through service 2, as part of the qualitative feedback and guidance provided to them.
**III.3.4b. Support to the evaluation process**

The Tool should provide the possibility for any evaluator or Jury member to:

- embed comments directly into the final proposal, *ad libitum*, these being accessible to any other evaluator or Jury member involved in the process.
- fill-in evaluation forms (to be provided by the Contracting Authority), and produce PDF format documents.
- any additional functionalities the Provider might offer based on his knowledge of project evaluation and management.

**IV – PROCEDURE**

As the Contracting Authority is a private entity, the envisaged acquisition does not qualify as a public procurement. However, as the European Union is currently the sole shareholder of the EIC Fund and since this acquisition will be funded out of Horizon 2020 budget operated by the EIC Fund, the European Commission considers it necessary to provide maximum transparency to this commercial transaction. Where appropriate and mutatis mutandis, this acquisition will be subject to processes similar to those of procurements.

**IV.1 – Submission and assessment**

**IV.1.1 – Submission of offers**

Interested Providers are invited to submit their offers by the 7 October 2020 at 5 pm at the latest, according to prescriptions detailed in section IV.2 hereunder.

Offers will publicly opened on the 9 October 2020 at 10 am, Luxemburg time in the Covent Garden building (EIC Task Force premises), Place Rogier, 16, 1210 Brussels.

A maximum of two representatives per applicant may attend the opening meeting. In such a case, and for organisational and security reasons, the applicant must provide the full name, date of birth, nationality and ID or passport number of the representatives in its application. The representatives will be required to present the submission receipt received as a result of the result of their offer and to sign an attendance sheet.

However, if for reasons linked to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is not feasible to organise the meeting physically, it will be organised via video conference. In such case, the necessary information will be provided by e-mail to applicants.

**IV.1.2 – Assessment of offers**

Offers will be assessed by a Panel appointed by the EIC Fund Governing Board, along the criteria detailed in Section IV.3. All applicants will be invited to an oral presentation in front of the Panel by the 20 October 2020 at the latest, where:
they will be given 45 minutes to present their offer and any existing supporting
demonstrator of similar services they already operate;
- they will be subject to the Panel’s questions for an additional 45 minutes, to
ascertain their understanding of the objectives and management principles of the
EIC and their technical and operational capacity to deliver the requested service.

For the interview applicants may use any relevant material, including video, demonstrator, etc.

A maximum of two representatives per applicant may attend the interview session. For
organisational and security reasons the applicant must provide the full name, date of birth,
nationality and ID or passport number of the representatives in its application. The
representatives will be required to present the submission receipt received as a result of the
result of their application and to sign an attendance sheet.

Panel will make its recommendation in the form of a priority list to the EIC Governing Board
that retains the final decision, to be adopted by the 30 of October at the latest.

**IV.2 – Offer**

Offers are to be submitted electronically (e-mail: rtd-eic-fund@ec.europa.eu) and are not
subject to any prescribed format, other than the following:

- be written in English;
- include legal documentation establishing the identity of the applicant;
- include an offer not exceeding 30 pages, presenting:
  - the Provider, its experience and achievements;
  - the service proposed and its technical aspects
  - resources the Provider intends to dedicate to deliver the requested service on
time
- any video presenting and/or access to any existing similar service operated by the
Provider

Joint offers (i.e. consortium) are possible.

Subcontracting is permitted to the condition that the Provider will retain full liability towards
the Contracting Authority for performance of the contract as a whole. In such a case, the
applicant is required to identify in its offer all subcontractors whose share of the contract would
be above 15%, in order for the Contracting Authority to ascertain the overall technical capacity
of the Provider.

**IV.3 – Criteria**

**IV.3.1 – Eligibility**
Participation is open on equal terms to all natural and legal persons established in any member State of the European Union and the Countries associated to Horizon 2020).

Following the entry into force of the Withdrawal Agreement concluded with the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK) on 1 February 2020, and in particular its Articles 127(6), 137 and 138, the references to natural or legal persons residing or established in a Member State of the European Union are to be understood as including natural or legal persons residing or established in the UK. UK residents and entities are therefore eligible to participate under this call.

IV.3.2 – Assessment criteria

The Panel and the EIC Fund Governing Board will assess and select offers along the following criteria:

- proven technical expertise and capabilities;
- quality of the proposed functionalities and of their underlying technology, with particular attention to those developed within the European Union;
- ability to deliver and provide subsequent support.

V – COMPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

The selected Provider will be referred to Allen & Overy (5 avenue J.F. Kennedy L-1855 Luxembourg; postal address: 5017 L-1050 Luxembourg) for contract negotiation and finalisation on behalf of the EIC Fund, which will sign the contract.

Electronic payment will be used.

For any question, applicants may contact rtd-eic-fund@ec.europa.eu Any question received and its answer will be disseminated to all known applicants.

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4 As of the date of this Call, the following countries are Associated Countries: Iceland, Norway, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Turkey, Israel, Moldova, Switzerland, Faroe Islands, Ukraine, Tunisia, Georgia, Armenia (for further up-dates please consult Horizon 2020 Participation Portal: http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/docs/h2020-funding-guide/cross-cuttingissues/international-cooperation_en.htm).

Other countries may become associated during the course of Horizon 2020.

Given that the EU does not recognise the illegal annexation of Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol, under the terms of the Horizon 2020 Association Agreement with Ukraine, legal persons established in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea or the city of Sevastopol are not eligible to participate.

5 Agreement on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community.