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EXECUTIVE AGENCY (EISMEA)

European Innovation Council (EIC)
EIC Pathfinder

EIC Pathfinder Challenges Applicants' Day (5 July 2022)

Frequently Asked Questions

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EIC Pathfinder Challenges

1. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A RESEARCH AND INNOVATION ACTION (RIA) UNDER THE HORIZON CLUSTERS (IN PILLAR II) AND UNDER AN EIC PATHFINDER CHALLENGE?

Horizon Europe funds different types of projects including, for example Research and innovation action (RIA), Innovation action (IA) Coordination and support action (CSA) Programme co-fund action (COFUND).

Research and Innovations Actions (RIA) are generally similar in different Horizon Europe programmes or topics, however each work programme or topic in the work programme describes more specifically what exactly is called for. For instance, the EIC Work Programme describes in more detail what applies to RIAs under EIC or specifically under a Pathfinder Challenge call, in terms of applicable eligibility rules and specific conditions for the implementation of the action. E.g., EIC Pathfinder Challenge RIAs will constitute a portfolio pro-actively managed by an EIC Programme Manager.

2. WHAT IS A TRL AND HOW CAN IT BE USED TO FIND THE APPROPRIATE FUNDING OPPORTUNITY?

Technology readiness levels (TRLs) are a measurement system providing a guide to the stage of development. TRLs are based on a scale from 1 to 9 with 9 being the most mature technology. TRLs are used in the Work Programme for guidance. The following definitions of TRLs apply, recognising that there are important differences between technological fields:

TRL 1 – basic principles observed

TRL 2 – technology concept formulated

TRL 3 – experimental proof of concept

TRL 4 – technology validated in lab

TRL 5 – technology validated in relevant environment (industrially relevant environment in the case of key enabling technologies)

TRL 6 – technology demonstrated in relevant environment (industrially relevant environment in the case of key enabling technologies)

TRL 7 – system prototype demonstration in operational environment

TRL 8 – system complete and qualified

TRL 9 – actual system proven in operational environment (competitive manufacturing in the case of key enabling technologies; or in space)

TRL can be used as guidance to assess

- the appropriateness to the EIC funds: EIC Pathfinder grant call for proposals is addressed to technologies at TRL 1-4; EIC Transition grant call for proposal is addressed to technologies at TRL 4 to 5/6; EIC Accelerator grant call for proposal, Fast Track (proposal from existing EIC Pathfinder, FET, EIC Transition or ERC POC project) and Plug-in (proposal resulting from existing national or regional programmes) schemes are addressed to technologies at TRL 5/6 to 9.

- the success of the EIC funded project: at the end of the EIC projects, consortia are expected to have significantly advanced the TRL of the proposed technology.

3. HOW MANY PROPOSALS ARE EXPECTED TO BE FUNDED UNDER THE EIC PATHFINDER CHALLENGES CALL?

The number of proposals funded under any EIC call depends on the budget allocated to the specific call. This is clearly stated in the EIC Work Programme of the year of the call in question. E.g. the indicative budget for the EIC Pathfinder Challenge call 2022 is 167 Million Euro. For this call, the EIC considers proposals with an EU contribution of up to EUR 4 million as appropriate, however other budgets are possible if well justified. Therefore around 45 proposals might be funded in the EIC Pathfinder Challenge call 2022. The budget is expected to be allocated in approximately equal shares across the (six) challenges, therefore around 7 proposals per challenge.

4. GUIDANCE TO APPLICANTS TO EIC CALLS

Potential applicants can be supported by:

1. the National Contact Points (NCPs) who support applicants to prepare to the EIC calls and provide them with the latest information about EIC calls and can provide practical advice and support on how to apply (<https://horizoneuropencpportal.eu/>);

2. The Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) with members in the EU and Associated Countries. It provides comprehensive information and support on different funding opportunities, in particular focussed on companies and for application to the EIC Accelerator or alternative sources of funding;

3. the staff of the EISMEA, and in particular the Call coordinators of the Call the applicant intends to apply to. They can be contacted via the Research Enquiry Service ([Research Enquiry Service \(europa.eu\)](https://research-enquiry-service.europa.eu/)).

5. DOES EIC PLAN EVENTS OR DIGITAL PORTAL TO ENCOURAGE INTERACTIONS BETWEEN POTENTIAL APPLICANTS TO BUILD FUTURE CONSORTIA?

The European Commission supports the formation of consortia for Pathfinder calls by means of its Partner Search tool on the Funding and Tenders Portal. Specific networking events or platforms may be organised/developed and announced at a later stage. Please also contact your National Contact Point for further information and support.

Consortium, beneficiaries

6. CAN SINGLE ENTITIES OR CONSORTIA OF TWO ENTITIES APPLY TO THE EIC PATHFINDER CHALLENGE CALL FOR PROPOSALS?

The EIC Pathfinder Challenges support collaborative research and innovation from consortia or proposals from single legal entities established in a Member State or an Associated Country.

All six challenges in WP 2022 are eligible for proposals by a single applicant or by a consortium of two or more applicants. We refer also to the 2022 EIC Work Programme, Annex 2 and Annex 3 for more details on the eligibility conditions.

7. CAN A LEGAL ENTITY BE INVOLVED IN MULTIPLE APPLICATIONS? CAN A SPECIFIC RESEARCHER BE INVOLVED IN MULTIPLE EIC APPLICATIONS?

Yes, eligible legal entities or a specific researcher can be involved in different applications to a same EIC call as long as double funding is avoided when multiple applications are selected for funding.

8. TO WHICH EXTENT IS INVOLVEMENT OF INDUSTRIAL PARTNERS MANDATORY/ENCOURAGED? AND WOULD A MULTINATIONAL COMPANY BE SEEN BETTER THAN AN SME?

The participation of SMEs and industrial partners in the EIC Pathfinder consortia is not compulsory.

In general, there is no specific expectation on the number nor type of partners in a consortium of EIC Pathfinder projects, which should be “fit-for-purpose”, i.e. decided in line with the S&T ambition, by ensuring an efficient implementation strategy of the planned R&I, dissemination and exploitation activities and considering quickly changing research landscape in given area(s).

Please note that under the Impact criterion (subcriterion ‘Innovation potential’), the suitability is assessed of proposed measures for involving and empowering key actors that have the potential to take the lead in translating research into innovations in the future.

9. CAN A SAME EIC PATHFINDER PROJECT LEAD TO SEVERAL EIC TRANSITION PROJECTS IF SEVERAL OF THE PARTNERS ARE DEVELOPING DIFFERENT EARLY TRL TECHNOLOGIES?

Yes, no limitation to the number of EIC transition grants is given per project result or per project that is eligible for the EIC Transition call.

10. ARE PARTNERS BASED IN UK, SWITZERLAND OR ANY OF THE NON-EU COUNTRIES ELIGIBLE FOR FUNDING?

As specified in the EIC Work Programme 2022, Annex 3, the entities eligible for funding can be established either in the Member States of the European Union, in countries associated to Horizon Europe (including overseas countries and territories (OCTs) or in the low- and middle-income countries.

Switzerland is a Third Country, and UK is considered an Associated Country due to the transitional arrangement for the minimum requirements for the eligibility of consortia. For further details, see in the [List of Participating Countries in Horizon Europe](#).

Applicants not requesting funding can be included in the consortium as Associated Partners. Applicants linked to other beneficiaries are considered Affiliated Partners. Associated and Affiliated Partners are not counted for the minimum requirements for the eligibility of the consortia.

11. CAN A UK ENTITY BE THE COORDINATOR?

A UK entity can be coordinator in the proposal since the UK is considered an Associated Country due to the transitional arrangement. Note that the coordinator needs to be a beneficiary. If UK is not associating to Horizon Europe by the time of the grant agreement signature, the UK entity will not be a beneficiary at that moment and it will then no longer be eligible as coordinator.

The proposal

12. WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES FOR BENEFICIARIES NOT HAVING A GENDER EQUALITY PLAN (GEP)? AND AT WHAT STAGE (EVALUATION OR GRANT SIGNATURE) IS IT REQUIRED?

The Gender Equality Plan is an eligibility criterion required for public bodies, research organisations and higher education establishments (further details in EIC WP 2022). This eligibility criterion does not apply to other categories of legal entities, such as private for-profit organisations, including SMEs, non-governmental or civil society organisations. Other strategic document, such as a development plan or an inclusion or diversity strategy, can be considered as an equivalent to the GEP.

A self-declaration will be requested at proposal stage. An organisation must have a GEP in place at the time of the Grant Agreement signature.

For further information, see [Gender equality in research and innovation \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/temp-form/af/af_he-eic-pathfinder-challenges_en.pdf) and [ec_rtd_gep-faqs.pdf \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/temp-form/af/af_he-eic-pathfinder-challenges_en.pdf).

13. WHAT IS THE APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF PAGES PER SECTION IN PART B?

In the Proposal template in the Funding and Tender portal (https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/temp-form/af/af_he-eic-pathfinder-challenges_en.pdf) indications on the page limits are given, for part B, it is stated that: '...The sections 1, 2 and 3, together, should not be longer than 25 pages. All tables, figures, references and any other element pertaining to these sections must be included as an integral part of these sections and are thus counted against this page limit....'.

No detailed breakdown of the page limit per section is added to give full freedom to the applicant to shape the proposal as wanted.

14. IS IT POSSIBLE TO INCLUDE "CO-FUNDING" FROM OUR INSTITUTE IN THE PROPOSAL?

The funding rate of the EIC Pathfinder Challenge grant is up to 100% of the eligible costs. It is possible to ask for an EU contribution which is less than 100% and the rest to be covered with in-kind contribution from one of the beneficiaries or partners of the consortium of the proposal.

15. CAN TASKS BE SUBCONTRACTED IN A PATHFINDER PROJECT? CAN TASKS BE SUBCONTRACTED TO PARTIES OUTSIDE THE EU-(ASSOCIATED) COUNTRIES?

Yes, Pathfinder beneficiaries/affiliated entities may charge 'Subcontracting costs', provided that those costs comply with the eligibility conditions as set out in the Grant Agreement. For more explanation, see the Annotated Grant Agreement, under Article 6.2.B Subcontracting costs.

Note that only limited parts of the action may be subcontracted, and it cannot be used to circumvent the eligibility rules of funding to for instance parties outside the EU-associated countries.

16. WHICH ARE THE ELIGIBLE COSTS OF PROJECTS FUNDED UNDER THE HORIZON EUROPE FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME?

The Eligible and Ineligible costs for EC grants funded under Horizon Europe Framework Programme are specified in article 6 of the Grant Agreement. For more explanation, see the Annotated Model Grant Agreement ([aga_en.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)).

17. HOW WILL PARTICIPATION IN PORTFOLIO ACTIVITIES BE SUPPORTED? AT THE SUBMISSION STAGE, DO PROPOSALS NEED TO ALLOCATE A BUDGET TO PORTFOLIO ACTIVITIES? WHAT WILL BE THE PORTFOLIO ACTIVITIES?

The EIC Portfolios will be overseen by EIC Programme Managers and the relevant EIC awardees may be requested to participate in portfolio activities together with other projects or initiatives. EIC portfolio activities are identified and developed by EIC Programme Managers in consultation with the EIC Awardees of the projects in the EIC Portfolio, with relevant Commission services and where appropriate with other interested EIC Community members and third parties. These activities are usually added in the Grant Agreement during the Grant Agreement Preparation stage. Examples of portfolio activities can be found in the relevant Challenge Guide and in Annex 6 of the EIC WP 2022.

Pathfinder Challenges proposals should thus foresee some activities and resources for portfolio activities.

18. IS THERE A WAY TO UNDERSTAND THE MAIN AREAS OF THE PROPOSALS IN PREPARATION SO NOT TO CONCENTRATE ON A SAME TECHNOLOGY?

There is no way to understand in advance (before the call deadline) the area nor the number of proposals in preparation. The choice of the field nor topic of your application should be strategic. The topic and/or technology you will centre your proposal on should be only linked to your competences and interest as this will increase your chances of success.

The evaluation process

19. ARE PROJECTS SEEKING MORE THAN 4M€ FUNDING (WITH A WELL JUSTIFIED BUDGET) REGARDED IN THE SAME WAY AS THOSE THAT COME UNDER 4M€?

EIC considers proposals with a requested EU contribution of up to EUR 4 million for Pathfinder Challenges as appropriate. Nonetheless, this does not preclude you to request larger amounts, if properly justified. They are subject to the evaluation in the same way, in particular ‘allocation of resources’ is a subcriterion under the award criterion ‘Quality and efficiency of the implementation’.

20. WILL THERE NOT BE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR REBUTTAL TO FIRST COMMENTS BEFORE THE FINAL EVALUATION, AS IS THE CASE FOR THE PATHFINDER OPEN?

The rebuttal process was introduced as a pilot in 2021 to the evaluations of proposals submitted to the Pathfinder Open call only. It had not been foreseen in this Pathfinder Challenge call. It is considered for the Pathfinder Challenge call in 2023.

21. IS THE EVALUATION OF A SINGLE PROPOSAL INFLUENCED BY THE POTENTIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER PROPOSALS UNDER EVALUATIONS/PORTFOLIO STRUCTURE OF THE PATHFINDER CHALLENGE CALLS?

All proposals which are eligible, admissible and within the scope (fall within a specific challenge) of the EIC Pathfinder Challenge calls will undergo a two step evaluation process.

For the first step, your proposal will be evaluated by EIC expert evaluators on each of the award criteria. The overall score will be the weighted sum of the three median scores from the three award criteria. All proposals that meet the thresholds defined in the award criteria will be considered in the second step.

As a second step, the evaluation committee (EIC expert evaluators and EIC Programme Managers) will establish a list of proposals to be funded, based on the evaluation scores from the first step and on each proposal’s contribution to the setting up of a consistent Challenge Portfolio of projects. Your proposal should therefore specify which objectives, or aspects of objectives, it addresses taking into account the technical specifications in the Challenge Guide (e.g. potential applications, range and expected outcomes of the projects, and the associated risks for achieving them, TRLs of the different tools and technologies proposed).

The evaluation of a single proposal on the award criteria is not influenced by other proposals, however the selection of the proposals for funding will depend on the portfolio considerations (which are described in the Challenge Guide) applied on the proposals that have passed the first step. Consequently, the selection for funding of one proposal depends on the other proposals. Likewise for a selection for funding based on score, the evaluation outcome in terms of funding selection depends on other proposals that are either scored higher or lower.

22. THE CALL FOR PROPOSALS DOES NOT EVALUATE THE CURRICULUM OR EXPERIENCE OF THE GROUPS THAT LEAD OR PARTICIPATE, DOES IT?

The EIC Pathfinder Challenge evaluation process does not directly evaluate the curriculum of the groups that lead or participate but assesses the quality of the applicant/consortium to the extent that they should have all the necessary high quality expertise for performing the project tasks (see 'Quality and efficiency of the implementation' evaluation criterion in the EIC WP 2022).

23. HOW CAN WE SHOW THE PROPOSED IDEA IS 'HIGH RISK-HIGH GAIN' BUT ALSO 'FEASIBLE'? HIGH RISK IMPLIES HIGH CHANCES OF FAILURE & LOW FEASIBILITY.

The proposals will be evaluated by a panel of high level experts in the field of your proposal. Therefore these experts will recognize the risks, the gains and the novelty linked to the research/technology proposed. The feasibility is more linked to the viability of the execution of the activity proposed rather than the likelihood of achieving the objectives as high risk is accepted. Therefore, the feasibility is more intended as the abilities of the consortium to carry out the actions described in the proposal (e.g. the competence of the members of the consortium on the subject and their access to the right technologies and/or facilities).

24. WHAT HAPPENS TO THE PROPOSALS ON THE RESERVE LISTS?

The proposals submitted to the EIC Pathfinder Challenge call that made it to the second evaluation step are ranked on the basis of the portfolio considerations to the rank up to which funding might be possible. The proposals within the call budget will be invited to the Grant Agreement Preparation (GAP). For the next proposals, the Responsible Authorising Officer may decide on a certain number of proposals to be put on a reserve list, following the ranking order. Should for any reason one of the proposals invited for the grant agreement preparation drop out (e.g. for eligibility reasons), or should additional funds become available, the next proposal from the reserve list will be invited to the GAP process. If this is not the case, the reserve listed proposals will also be rejected.

Project execution

25. HOW IP / KNOW-HOW / CONFLICT OF INTERESTS WILL BE MANAGED IN THE PORTFOLIO PROJECTS?

Annex 7 of the EIC WP 2022 contains details on this subject. The EIC aims to stimulate the cross-fertilisation and exploitation of results from EIC supported projects. Therefore, EIC Pathfinder and EIC Transition projects may be requested by EIC Programme Managers to actively share information about results (including preliminary findings), within their EIC Portfolio and with other relevant EIC projects and parties to stimulate and nurture potential innovation and explore pathways to further development. This exchange of information between EIC Awardees will be without prejudice to their own legitimate interests to exploit the results or findings. To ensure full confidentiality, such sharing will be subject to non-disclosure obligations regarding confidential results, with EIC Awardees retaining the right on a case by case basis to fully disclose or not their intellectual property.