



Single Market Programme (Standardisation pillar)

Call for proposals to conclude a
Framework Partnership Agreement

Representation of SMEs' interests in European standardisation

EISMEA-SMP-STA-FPA-SME-2021

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EUROPEAN INNOVATION COUNCIL AND SMEs
EXECUTIVE AGENCY (EISMEA)

SMP/Internal Market and Consumers

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

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0. Introduction

This is a call for proposals for EU financial framework partnerships for grants in the field of Standardisation actions under the Standardisation pillar of the **Single Market Programme (SMP Standardisation)**.

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

- Regulation (EU) 2018/1046 ([EU Financial Regulation](#))
- the basic act (SMP Regulation [2021/690¹](#)) and
- [Regulation \(EU\) 1025/2012](#) on European standardisation²
- The call is launched in accordance with the 2021 SMP Bundle Work Programme³ and will be managed by the **European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency (EISMEA)** (the 'Agency').

Framework partnerships (FPAs) are instruments that serve as an umbrella to establish a legal frame for a long-term cooperation which typically leads to several or recurrent grants in the same field or area and under a common action plan (for action grants or operating grants). FPAs are a prerequisite for being able to apply for these grants, but don't create any legitimate expectations or entitlement to get them. FPA beneficiaries are normally identified on the basis of a standard evaluation and award procedure and then invited to submit their proposals for specific grants (closed calls; invitation to submit a proposal addressed directly to the framework partners). Specific Grant Agreements (SGAs) can only be signed if the FPA has been signed, and before the end date of the FPA.

For information - Operating grants provide general financial support to organisations whose statutory activities serve the strategic objectives of EU policies (*mainly non-profit organisations, voluntary associations, foundations, NGOs or similar*). They do not support a specific project (like *action grants*), but the annual operating budget of the organisation (or part of it). Operating grants are always mono-beneficiary grants supporting the annual action plan only one organisation. They follow the same rules for the grant agreements as *action grants*, but do not differentiate between direct and indirect costs. Receiving an operating grant may however have an impact on the possibility to receive the indirect costs flat-rate in EU action grants.

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. 1-47).

² Regulation (EU) No 1025/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 on European standardisation, amending Council Directives 89/686/EEC and 93/15/EEC and Directives 94/9/EC, 94/25/EC, 95/16/EC, 97/23/EC, 98/34/EC, 2004/22/EC, 2007/23/EC, 2009/23/EC and 2009/105/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council and repealing Council Decision 87/95/EEC and Decision No 1673/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council (OJ L 316/12 of 14.11.2012).

³ Annex 1 to Commission Implementing Decision C(2021)3046 final of 06.05.2021 on the financing of the Programme for single market, competitiveness of enterprises, including small and medium-sized enterprises, and European statistics and the adoption of the work programme for 2021-2024.

This call covers the following **topic**:

Framework Partnership Agreement with Support organisations representing small and middle-sized enterprises (SMEs) in standardisation activities.

We invite you to read the **call documentation** carefully, and in particular this Call Document and the Model Framework Partnership Agreement.

These documents provide clarifications and answers to questions you may have when preparing your application:

- the Call Document outlines the:
 - background, objectives, scope, activities that can be funded and the expected results (sections 1 and 2)
 - timetable and available budget (sections 3 and 4)
 - admissibility and eligibility conditions (including mandatory documents; sections 5 and 6)
 - criteria for financial and operational capacity and exclusion (section 7)
 - evaluation and award procedure (section 8)
 - award criteria (section 9)
 - legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements (section 10)
 - how to submit an application (section 11)
- the MFPA — Model Framework Partnership Agreement contains:
 - Detailed information on all the provisions in the Framework Partnership Agreement you will have to sign in order to be invited to submit a proposal for a specific grant (*including cost eligibility, payment schedule, accessory obligations, etc*).

1. Background

The Regulation (EU) No 1025/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council on European standardisation, adopted on 25 October 2012 (the Regulation), emphasises the importance of the participation of all relevant interested parties, including SMEs and societal and social stakeholders in the European standardisation process.

Standards are important tools for the competitiveness of undertakings, especially SMEs, whose participation in the standardisation process is important for technological progress and achieving digital and green transitions. Furthermore, standards can have a broad impact on society, particularly on citizens' safety and well-being, the efficiency of networks, the environment, workers' safety and working conditions, accessibility and other public policy fields.

However, standards in each field are developed by specialised technical experts. These experts represent the fields of activity and interest of the companies where they work. Therefore, the EU needs to facilitate and support the representation of the fields of activity and interests of SMEs, societal and social stakeholders in the standardisation process, especially in the European context where European standards play a significant role in supporting the EU legislation and EU policies.

Historically, different EU programmes had supported the participation of SMEs and societal and social stakeholders. The Regulation has put the inclusiveness of the

European standardisation process as a priority and unified the legal basis for the role, the establishment and the financing of European stakeholders' organisations in standardisation.

The recently updated New Industrial Strategy (COM/2021/350) aims to deliver on three key priorities: maintaining European industry's global competitiveness and a level playing field, at home and globally, making Europe climate-neutral by 2050 and shaping Europe's digital future. In the strategy, the Commission announced that it would present a strategy on standardisation. This strategy will support a more assertive stance on European interests in standardisation (in the EU and globally) and work openly with others on certain areas of mutual interests. Without question, SMEs will play a crucial role within the industrial ecosystems (as preliminarily identified in the Staff Working Document accompanying the Recovery Plan⁴) in digitalising and greening the European economy. It is therefore very important that they are properly represented in the European standardisation process relevant to the twin transition.

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

Objectives

The main objective of this call is to facilitate appropriate representation and effective participation of SMEs in the European standardisation process.

As a result of this call, the Agency might conclude with the selected Framework Partner(s) (hereafter “the Partner(s)”) an FPA for an initial period covering 2022 to 2025 for the provision of specific grants (action or operating grants).

Based on Article 130(4)(c) of the EU Financial Regulation 2018/1046 the duration of the FPA shall not exceed four years, save in duly justified cases which are clearly indicated by the Contracting Authority in its annual activity report (Article 74 (9) of EU Financial Regulation).

In the application for a FPA, the applicants are requested to propose a multi-annual **action plan** for grants. The plan should cover the envisaged period of the FPA. It should provide information on the envisaged activities in support of the industrial strategy and in particular in digitalising and greening the European economy. It should also provide information on how the applicant(s) see their role and their objectives within the industrial ecosystems and the European standardisation system.

In case of successful application for a FPA and after the signature of the FPA, upon the request of the Agency, the Partner(s) will be asked to revise the proposed multi-annual Action plan at least once during the term of the multiannual financial framework in accordance with the Art 130(1) of the EU Financial Regulation and in consideration with the recommendations of the Agency and to submit it to the Agency for agreement. Based on the agreed annual action plan **specific action grants or operating grants** can be awarded.

Article 16 of Regulation (EU) 1025/2012 defines the scope of the activities for such Union financing:

- (a) the functioning of these organisations and of their activities relating to European and international standardisation, including the processing of technical work and the provision of information to members and other interested parties;

⁴ SWD(2020) 98 final.

- (b) the provision of legal and technical expertise, including studies, in relation to assessment of the need for, and the development of, European standards and European standardisation deliverables and training of experts;
- (c) the participation in the technical work with respect to the development and revision of European standards and European standardisation deliverables which is necessary and suitable for the support of Union legislation and policies;
- (d) the promotion of European standards and European standardisation deliverables, and the information on and use of, standards among interested parties, including SMEs and consumers.

Article 5 of Regulation (EU) 1025/2012 requests the European standardisation organisations (ESOs) to encourage and facilitate an appropriate representation and effective participation of all relevant stakeholders, especially through the European stakeholder organisations receiving Union financing, in their standardisation activities, such as:

- (a) the proposal and acceptance of new work items;
- (b) the technical discussion on proposals;
- (c) the submission of comments on drafts;
- (d) the revision of existing European standards or European standardisation deliverables;
- (e) the dissemination of information of, and awareness-building about, adopted European standards or European standardisation deliverables.

The Partner(s) will also work in cooperation with the Committee on Standards set up under the Article 22 of the Regulation (EU) 1025/2012 and respond to the consultation launched under Article 8.4 by the Commission on annual work programme for European standardisation and other standardisation related decisions.

To implement the Regulation, the Partner(s) will ensure that its membership policy is open and easy for all relevant associations to join. Efforts must be made to ensure a broad sectoral and geographical coverage in order to represent the interests of SMEs in at least two thirds of the Member States. The Partner(s) will participate in the work of a selected number of Technical bodies of ESOs based on a systematic and comprehensive review of the relevance of all ESOs' technical bodies to SMEs interest and to the priorities of the European Commission.

The selection of experts in the fields of activities approved in the annual action plan of the beneficiary and the criteria of assessment will be open and transparent. The list of experts will be published and updated on the Partner(s)' website.

The Partner(s) will set up a consultation procedure involving all relevant actors. The Partner(s) must ensure that its system of consultation, ex ante and ex post, is robust, clear, comprehensive, sound, broad, transparent, consensual, inclusive and proactive. The Partner(s) will also ensure that any adopted position is made publicly available and includes clear information on organisations, which were consulted, how this position was achieved and which organisations contributed to it. All the steps of the consultation (ex-ante, ex-post), the contributions of every party and the final position taken will be disclosed on the Partner(s)' website.

The Partner(s) will inform regularly all interested parties about its work, in terms of its activities, processes, positions and achieved results. Under Article 24 (2) of the Regulation, the Partner(s) is/are requested to provide the Agency with an annual report on its activity containing detailed information about the membership and activities referred to in Article 16 of the Regulation. This information/report will be fully shared by the Agency with the Commission, also for publication on the dedicated Commission's website.

The Partner(s) is/are expected to cooperate with the other European organisations representing stakeholders financed under the provisions of the Annex III of the Regulation to improve the inclusiveness of the European standardisation system and to promote the participation of SMEs and societal and social stakeholders in the standardisation activities. The Partner(s) will participate in the coordination meetings of stakeholder representation organisations and coordination meetings with ESOs (2 to 4 meetings per year in Brussels or remotely). The Partner(s) will attend the meetings of the Committee on standards set up under Article 22 (1) of the Regulation as an observer (2 to 4 meetings per year in Brussels or remotely).

The Partner(s) will set up a mechanism for an efficient and effective interaction with the Agency for the FPA and the management of the specific grants (2 to 4 meetings per year in Brussels or remotely).

Activities that can be funded under the Specific Grant Agreements (scope)

Only projects which can be identified as aiming to increase and strengthen the representation of SMEs interests in standardisation activities may receive Union financial assistance. The project has to comply, in particular, with the following objectives:

- awareness and dissemination actions aiming at the promotion of European standardisation system, European standards and the information on, and use of, standards among interested parties;
- training of experts in European and international standardisation;
- studies, analyses, mapping projects and technical expertise in relation to the assessment of the need for, and the development and revision of, European standards;
- conferences, seminars;
- actions aiming at cooperation with the European Standardisation Organisations (ESOs) in view of facilitating the appropriate representation and effective participation of all relevant stakeholders, including SMEs, consumer organisations and environmental and social stakeholders in their standardisation activities;
- actions related to the participation in the development and revision of standards (i.e. proposal of new work items, technical discussion on proposals, submission of comments on drafts, use of the Right of Opinion within CEN and CENELEC, revision of existing standards);
- actions aiming at improving all relevant stakeholders, including SMEs, consumer organisations and environmental and social stakeholders' visibility and relevance at national level;
- actions aiming at strengthening the cooperation with the other Annex III organisations;
- actions aiming at facilitating and enhancing the cooperation with the European Commission and the Agency.

In this context, any project directly or indirectly contrary to EU policy or against public health, human rights, citizen's security or freedom of expression will be rejected.

3. Available budget for specific grants - for information

The EU contribution is limited to a maximum reimbursement rate of **85 %** of eligible costs under an action grant and of **95%** eligible costs under an operating grant.

Taking into account the repartition of the budget among the Annex III organisations, awarded in the last years through specific grant agreements under the previous FPAs concluded with the European Commission, and in light of the policy priorities of the current mandate of the European Commission, the maximum grant amount for organisations representing SMEs interests per year is estimated to be allocated according to the following proportions:

Budget per Year	2021	2022*	2023*	2024*
Maximum amount for organisations referred to Annex III of Regulation (EU)1025/2012	EUR 4,7 million	EUR 4,7 million	EUR 4,8 million	EUR 5 million
SMEs budget**	35%	35%	35%	35%

* Estimation.

** As an example, the maximum grant amount for SMEs’ budget in 2022 would be 35% of EUR 4.7 million, i.e. EUR 1.6 million.

The budget for 2022-2024 is subject to the adoption of the respective Financing Decisions of the Commission.

Only the Partner(s) having signed an FPA with the Agency will be invited to submit specific proposals for grants.

Depending on the number and quality of proposals, the Agency expects to sign at least one FPA.

4. Timetable and deadlines

Timetable and deadlines (indicative)	
FPA	
Call opening:	07 October 2021
<u>Deadline for submission:</u>	29 October 2021– 17:00:00 CET (Brussels)
Evaluation:	October/November 2021
Information on evaluation results:	November-December 2021
FPA signature:	December 2021
First SGA call – indicative	
Invitations to submit proposals:	December 2021
Opening for submission:	December 2021
<u>Deadline for submission:</u>	<u>December 2021-January 2022</u>
Evaluation:	<u>December 2021-January 2022</u>
Information on evaluation results:	<u>December 2021-January 2022</u>
GA signature:	<u>December 2021-January 2022</u>

Starting date of grant:	1 January 2022
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5. Admissibility and documents

Proposals must be submitted before the **call deadline** (*see timetable section 4*).

Proposals must be submitted **electronically (see section 11) to the functional mailbox EISMEA-STA-SME-2021@ec.europa.eu**.

Paper submissions are NOT possible.

Proposals (including annexes and supporting documents) must be submitted using the forms provided in this call. 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
- Application Form Part B — contains the technical description of the project
- mandatory annexes and supporting documents:
 - Declaration on Honour.

At proposal submission, the coordinator 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 FPA 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 **30 pages** (Part B, excluding annexes). 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*).

Failure to comply with those requirements might lead to rejection of the application.

6. Eligibility

Eligible participants (eligible countries)

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

- be legal entities (private bodies)
- be established in one of the eligible countries, i.e.:
 - EU Member States (including overseas countries and territories (OCTs))
- meet the eligibility criteria for Union financing specified in the Annex III of Regulation (EU) 1025/2012:
 - be a **European organisation representing SMEs in European standardisation activities** which:

- (a) is non-governmental and non-profit-making;
- (b) has as its statutory objectives and activities to represent the interests of SMEs in the standardisation process at European level, to raise their awareness for standardisation and to motivate them to become involved in the standardisation process;
- (c) has been mandated by non-profit organisations representing SMEs in at least two thirds of the Member States, to represent the interests of SMEs in the standardisation process at European level.

Applicants must be able to prove the eligibility conditions listed above with supporting documents attached to the application form.

Applicants 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). *The Participant Register is the Commission online tool to register and manage the data of the organisations participating in the EU programmes. It allows consistent handling of the applicants' official data and avoids multiple requests to enter the same information.* **If applicants want to participate in this call for proposals, their organisation needs to be self-registered in the [Participant Register](#) – before the submission of the proposal - and have obtained a 9-digit Participant Identification Code (PIC).** For the validation, participants will be requested to upload documents showing legal status and origin. 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

Entities affiliated to the applicants are only eligible to receive funding under specific grants concluded under the FPA.

International organisations — International organisations are NOT 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 persons⁵.

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'⁶.  Please note that if the specific action will be implemented by the members, they should also participate in the specific action (either as beneficiaries or as affiliated entities, otherwise their costs will NOT be eligible).

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*

⁵ See Article 197(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

⁶ For the definitions, see Articles 187(2) and 197(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

(TEU) and Article 215 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU)⁷ and entities covered by Commission Guidelines No [2013/C 205/05](#)⁸). 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).

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

Consortium composition

Proposals can be submitted by single applicants or a consortium of legal entities complying each with the admissibility, eligibility, non-exclusion and selection criteria set out in this call, and implementing together the proposed action plan.

Eligible activities

Eligible activities are the ones set out in section 2 above.

Projects should take into account the results of projects supported by other EU funding programmes. The complementarities must be described in the project proposals (Part B of the Application Form).

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

Financial support to third parties is not allowed.

Proposals for specific grants must be consistent with the **multi-annual action plan** submitted for the FPA. Only applications that have first signed a FPA will be considered eligible.

Duration

The maximum duration of the FPAs is four years.

Specific grants Project budget – only for information

The project budget (maximum grant amount) for 2022 is expected to be around EUR 1.6 million for specific grants.

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 specific 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.

⁷ 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](#).

⁸ Commission guidelines No [2013/C 205/05](#) on the eligibility of Israeli entities and their activities in the territories occupied by Israel since June 1967 for grants, prizes and financial instruments funded by the EU from 2014 onwards (OJ C 205 of 19.07.2013, pp. 9-11).

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)
- prefinancing paid in instalments
- (one or more) prefinancing guarantees (see below, section 10)

or

- propose no prefinancing
- request that you are replaced or, if needed, reject the entire proposal.

For FPAs, the financial capacity check will be done only once at FPA-level, for all applicants (since no budget threshold because no budget).  For more information, see [Rules for Legal Entity Validation, LEAR Appointment and Financial Capacity Assessment](#).

Operational capacity

Applicants must have the **know-how, qualifications** and **resources** to successfully implement the projects and contribute their share (including sufficient experience in projects of comparable size and nature).

This capacity will be assessed together with the 'Quality' award criterion, on the basis of the competence and experience of the applicants and their project teams, including operational resources (human, technical and other) or, exceptionally, the measures proposed to obtain it by the time the task implementation starts.

If the evaluation of the award criterion is positive, the applicants are considered to have sufficient operational capacity.

Applicants will have to show their capacity via the following information provided in addition to the application form:

- a summary table indicating the persons that will make up the core team responsible for managing and implementing the project with their qualifications and competences (accompanied by a curriculum vitae or description of the profile of the people);
- the organisation's activity reports of the last 3 years;
- an exhaustive lists of previous projects and activities performed and connected to standardisation or to the actions to be carried out;
- a brief summary of an official strategy/policy paper/action plan or another proof of evidence of a successful model in place in the field of standardisation priority/topic;

- a brief description of the technical capacity available for an effective participation in the technical work with respect to the development and revision of European standards which is necessary for the support of Union legislation and policies;
- a description of the technical equipment, tools or facilities and patents at the disposal of the applicant;
- a proof of national membership of at least two thirds of Member States;
- a description of the geographical coverage in terms of membership and the strategy to develop it further;
- an inventory of natural or economic resources involved in the project.

Additional supporting documents may be requested, if needed to confirm the operational capacity of any applicant.

For FPAs, the operational capacity check will be done generally at FPA-level and then again for each specific grant application.

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 participate⁹:

- bankruptcy, winding up, affairs administered by the courts, arrangement with creditors, suspended business activities or other similar procedures (including procedures for persons with unlimited liability for the applicant’s debts)
- in breach of social security or tax obligations (including if done by persons with unlimited liability for the applicant’s debts)
- guilty of grave professional misconduct¹⁰ (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 FPA)
- 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 FPA)
- 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 FPA)
- 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 FPA)
- 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

⁹ See Articles 136 and 141 of EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

¹⁰ 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.

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 FPA).

Applicants will also be refused if it turns out that¹¹:

- 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).

For FPAs, exclusion will be checked before FPA signature and then again before signature of each specific grant.

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** 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 a **priority order** will be determined according to the following approach:

Successively for every group of *ex aequo* proposals, starting with the highest scored group, and continuing in descending order:

- 1) Projects focusing on a theme that is not otherwise covered by higher ranked projects will be considered to have the highest priority.
- 2) The *ex aequo* proposals will be prioritised according to the scores they have been awarded for the award criterion 'Relevance'. When these scores are equal, priority will be based on their scores for the criterion 'Impact'. When these scores are equal, priority will be based on their scores for the criterion 'Quality'.

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

 No commitment for funding — Invitation to conclude a FPA does NOT constitute a formal commitment for funding, neither the subsequent invitation to prepare a specific grant. We will still need to make various legal checks before grant award: *legal entity validation, operational 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 FPA.

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).

¹¹ See Article 141 EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

9. Award criteria

The **award criteria** for this call are as follows:

- **Relevance:** clarity and consistency of action plan, objectives and planning; extent to which they match the themes and priorities and objectives of the call; contribution to the EU strategic and legislative context; European/transnational dimension; impact/interest for EU 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 action plan (concept and methodology, management, procedures, timetable, risks and risk management, monitoring and evaluation); feasibility of the action plan within the proposed time frame; **(30 points)**
 - **Project team and cooperation arrangements:** quality of the consortium and project teams; appropriate procedures and problem-solving mechanisms for cooperating within the project teams and consortium **(30 points)**
- **Impact:** ambition and expected long-term impact of results on target groups/general public; appropriate dissemination strategy for ensuring sustainability and long-term impact; sustainability of results after EU funding ends **(10 points).**

Award criteria	Minimum pass score	Maximum score
Relevance	21	30
Quality — Project design and implementation	21	30
Quality — Project team and cooperation arrangements	21	30
Impact	7	10
Overall (pass) scores	70	100

Maximum points: 100 points.

Individual thresholds per criterion: 21/30, 21/30, 21/30 and 7/10 points.

Overall threshold: 70 points.

Proposals that pass the individual thresholds AND the overall threshold will be considered for awarding an FPA. Other proposals will be rejected.

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

If you pass evaluation of the FPA, your project will be invited to prepare the Framework Partnership Agreement which will set out the framework and legal conditions of this partnership. Two copies of the original FPA must be signed first by the Partner(s)/beneficiary or coordinator on behalf of the consortium and returned to the Agency immediately. The Agency will sign it last.

After the signature of the FPA, the Partner(s) will be subsequently invited to submit a proposal for a Specific Grant Agreement (SGA). If your proposal for a SGA passes successfully the evaluation, you will be invited for grant preparation of a Specific Grant Agreement, where you will be asked to prepare the SGA together with the EU Project Officer.

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

Two copies of the original agreement must be signed first by the Partner(s)/beneficiary or coordinator on behalf of the consortium and returned to the Agency immediately. The Agency will sign it last.

Starting date and project duration of the Grant Agreements

The starting date and duration will be fixed in the Grant Agreements (*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 before the proposal submission.

FPA – starting date at the latest on 1 January 2022 for 48 months (extensions are possible, if duly justified and through an amendment).

SGA- action grant project duration: between 12 and 48 months (extensions are possible, if duly justified and through an amendment).

SGA- operating grant: financial year of beneficiary.

Milestones and deliverables of the Specific Grant Agreement – for information

The milestones and deliverables for each project will be reflected in Annex 1 of the Specific Grant Agreement.

Form of grant, funding rate and maximum grant amount of the Specific Grant Agreement – for information

The specific grant parameters (*maximum grant amount, funding rate, total eligible costs, etc*) will be fixed in the Specific Grant Agreement (*Data Sheet, point 3 and art 5*).

SGA - Project budget (maximum grant amount): see section 6 above. The grant awarded may be lower than the amount requested.

The specific grant will be a budget-based mixed actual cost grant actual costs. 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).

The costs will be reimbursed at the funding rate fixed in the Specific Grant Agreement (**85 %** of eligible costs under an action grant and of **95%** eligible costs under an operating grant).

Grants may NOT produce a profit (i.e. surplus of revenues + EU grant over costs).

Moreover, please be aware that the final grant amount may be reduced in case of non-compliance with the Specific Grant Agreement (e.g. improper implementation, breach of obligations, etc).

Budget categories and cost eligibility rules – for information

The budget categories and cost eligibility rules are fixed in the Specific Grant Agreement (*Data Sheet, point 3, art 6 and Annex 2*).

Budget categories for the subsequent call for specific grants:

- 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 (not applicable for Operating Grants)
- 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: *n/a*
- E. Indirect costs (*not applicable for Operating Grants*)

Specific cost eligibility conditions for this call:

- personnel costs:
 - SME owner/natural person unit cost (*not applicable for Operating Grants*): Yes
- travel and subsistence unit cost¹²: Yes
- equipment costs: depreciation
- indirect cost flat-rate (*not applicable for Operating Grants*): 7% of the eligible direct costs (categories A-D, 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.

Information for Operating Grants: Indirect costs — For operating grants, there is no differentiation between direct and indirect cost (because the grant aims to a large extent the financing of costs which would normally be considered 'indirect', i.e.

¹² 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).

general management costs, general running costs etc). Receiving an operating grant may however make you ineligible for receiving indirect costs in your EU action grants. If you intend to also apply for action grants, please make sure that you either have the accounting tools in place to combine them (or that the operating grants pays off — meaning that it covers enough of your general running costs and overheads to compensate the loss of the indirect costs in the action grants).

Reporting and payment arrangements for Specific Grants Agreements – for information


The reporting and payment arrangements are fixed in the Specific Grant Agreement (*Data Sheet, point 4 and art 21 and 22*).

After signature of the SGA, you will normally receive a **prefinancing** to start working on the project (float of normally **50%** of the maximum grant amount; exceptionally less or no prefinancing). The prefinancing will be paid 30 days from entry into force/10 days before starting date — whichever is the latest.

There will be no **interim payments**.

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. The Specific Grant Agreement contains additional record-keeping rules (*Data Sheet, point 3 and art 20*).

Prefinancing guarantees for Specific Grant Agreements – for information

If a prefinancing guarantee is required, it will be fixed in the Specific Grant Agreement (*Data Sheet, point 4*). The amount will be set during grant preparation and it will normally be equal or lower than the prefinancing for your grant.

The guarantee should be in euro and issued by an approved bank/financial institution established in an EU Member State. If you are established in a non-EU country and would like to provide a guarantee from a bank/financial institution in your country, please contact us (this may be exceptionally accepted, if it offers equivalent security).

Amounts blocked in bank accounts will NOT be accepted as financial guarantees.

Prefinancing guarantees are formally NOT linked to individual consortium members, which means that you are free to organise how to provide the guarantee amount (*by one or several beneficiaries, for the overall amount or several guarantees for partial amounts, by the beneficiary concerned or by another beneficiary, etc*). It is however important that the requested amount is covered and that the guarantee(s) are sent to us in time to make the prefinancing (scanned copy via Portal AND original by post).

If agreed with us, the bank guarantee may be replaced by a guarantee from a third party.

The guarantee will be released at the end of the grant, in accordance with the conditions laid down in the Specific Grant Agreement.

Certificates for Specific Grants Agreements – for information

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 Specific Grant Agreement (*Data Sheet, point 4 and art 24*).

Liability regime for recoveries under Specific Grant Agreements – for information

The liability regime for recoveries will be fixed in the Specific 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 under Specific Grant Agreements – for information

IPR rules: *see Model Grant Agreement (art 16 and Annex 5)*:

- list of background: Yes
- rights of use on results: Yes
- access rights to ensure continuity and interoperability obligations: Yes

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: No

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

Other specificities

Not applicable

Non-compliance and breach of contract

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

11. How to submit an application for a FPA

All applications must be submitted **electronically** to the dedicated email address: EISMEA-STA-SME-2021@ec.europa.eu.

Applications sent by fax or paper submission will not be accepted.

No modification to the application is allowed once the deadline for submission has elapsed. However, if there is a need to clarify certain aspects or to correct clerical mistakes, the Agency may contact the applicant during the evaluation process.

Applications must be complete, submitted in the correct form, duly completed dated, and signed by the person authorised to enter into legally binding commitments on behalf of the applicant organisation.

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

a) create a user account and register your organisation

All participants need to [create an EU Login user account](#).

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

b) submit the application

Submit your application, as follows:

- Application form (Part A & B). Fill it in and submit it as a PDF file.
- Annexes (*see section 5*). Submit them as PDF files.

The size limit of a single message (email message) is 30 MB including its attachments. However on iPhone and iPad, the message size limit with the native email client is 10 MB, due to technical constrains.

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

The complete application must be submitted **before the call deadline** (*see section 4*).

Once the application 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 an IT problem, you should immediately file a complaint via the functional mailbox EISMEA-STA-SME-2021@ec.europa.eu, explaining the circumstances and attaching a copy of the proposal (and, if possible, screenshots to show what happened).

12. Help

Contact

Call and application related questions should be sent to the following email address: EISMEA-STA-SME-2021@ec.europa.eu until 25/10/2021, 17:00:00 CET, Brussels time.

Please indicate clearly the reference of the call and application 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 Call page regularly. We will use it to publish updates and additional information on the call (call and topic updates).
- **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—*not applicable of Operating grants*** — 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.

For **EU framework partnership agreements**, the consortium must be formed at FPA level. Only entities which are part of the FPA can become beneficiaries of Specific Grants Agreements awarded under the FPA.

- **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** (*n/a for FPAs*) — 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** (*n/a for FPAs*) — 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** (*n/a for FPAs*) — 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** (*n/a for OG and FPAs*) — 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
- **Multiple proposals** — Applicants may submit more than one proposal for *different* projects under the same call (and be awarded a funding for them).
Organisations may participate in several proposals.
BUT: if there are several proposals for *very similar* projects, only one application will be accepted and evaluated; the applicants will be asked to withdraw one of them (or it will be rejected).
- **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.