



Single Market Programme (SMP COSME)

Call for proposals

EU-SME Centre in China – phase V
(SMP-COSME-2024-SMECC)

Version 1.0
24 October 2024



HISTORY OF CHANGES			
Version	Publication Date	Change	Page
1.0	24.10.2024	▪ Initial version.	
		▪	
		▪	
		▪	



EUROPEAN INNOVATION COUNCIL AND SMES EXECUTIVE AGENCY (EISMEA)

Innovation Ecosystems, SMP/Entrepreneurship and Consumers
SMP/SME Pillar, Internal Market and Support to Standardisation

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

0. Introduction	5
1. Background	6
1.1 Introduction	6
1.2. Policy Context	7
2. Objectives – Themes and priorities – Activities that can be funded – Expected impact	10
Objectives	10
Themes and priorities (scope)	11
Activities that can be funded (scope).....	12
Expected impact.....	16
3. Available budget	17
4. Timetable and deadlines	18
6. Eligibility	19
Eligible participants (eligible countries)	19
Specific cases	20
Consortium composition	21
Eligible activities	21
Geographic location (target countries)	22
Duration	22
Project budget	22
7. Financial and operational capacity and exclusion	22
Financial capacity	22
Operational capacity	23
Exclusion	24
8. Evaluation and award procedure	25

- 9. Award criteria** 26
- 10. Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements**..... 27
 - Starting date and project duration 27
 - Milestones and deliverables 27
 - Form of grant, funding rate and maximum grant amount 28
 - Budget categories and cost eligibility rules 28
 - Reporting and payment arrangements..... 29
 - Prefinancing guarantees 30
 - Certificates..... 30
 - Liability regime for recoveries 30
 - Provisions concerning the project implementation 31
 - Other specificities 31
 - Non-compliance and breach of contract 31
- 11. How to submit an application** 31
- 12. Help** 32
 - Contact..... 32

0. Introduction

This is a call for proposals for EU **action grants** in the field of “improving the competitiveness of enterprises, particularly SMEs, and supporting their access to markets” under the Competitiveness of Enterprises and SMEs strand of the **Single Market Programme (SMP – SME Pillar)**.

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

- Regulation 2024/2509 ([EU Financial Regulation](#)¹)
- the basic act ([Single Market Programme \(SMP\) Regulation \(EU\) 2021/690](#)²).

The call is launched in accordance with the 2024-27 SMP Work Programme³ and will be managed by the **European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency** (hereinafter also referred to as **EISMEA** or Agency⁴).

The call covers the following **topic**:

- **SMP-COSME-2024-SMECC-01 — EU-SME Centre in China**

Each project application under the call must address only the above-mentioned topic.

Applicants (beneficiaries and affiliated entities) may submit only ONE proposal under the same call (and be awarded a funding).

Applicants may NOT participate in several proposals. If they participate or submit several proposals, only one application will be accepted and evaluated; the applicants will be asked to withdraw from the other applications (or they will be rejected).

We invite you to read the **call documentation** carefully, and in particular this Call Document, the Model Grant Agreement, the [EU Funding & Tenders Portal Online Manual](#) and the [EU Grants AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement](#).

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

- the [Call Document](#) outlines the:
 - background, objectives, scope, activities that can be funded and the expected results (sections 1 and 2)

¹ [Regulation \(EU, Euratom\) 2024/2509](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 September 2024 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union (recast) (OJ L, 2024/25/09, 26.9.2024).

² 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).

³ Annex 2 to the Commission Implementing Decision C(2024)5420 of 31 July 2024 amending Implementing Decision C(2023)8926 as regards the implementation of certain actions under the Single Market Programme (SMP Work programme 2024-2027).

⁴ EISMEA was set up by Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2021/173 of 12 February 2021 establishing the European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency, the European Health and Digital Executive Agency, the European Research Executive Agency, the European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency, the European Research Council Executive Agency, and the European Education and Culture Executive Agency and repealing Implementing Decisions 2013/801/EU, 2013/771/EU, 2013/778/EU, 2013/779/EU, 2013/776/EU and 2013/770/EU (OJ L 50/9 of 15.2.2021). The Agency started operating on 1 April 2021.

- 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 Online Manual outlines the:
 - procedures to register and submit proposals online via the EU Funding & Tenders Portal ('Portal')
 - recommendations for the preparation of the application
- the AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement contains:
 - detailed annotations on all the provisions in the Grant Agreement you will have to sign in order to obtain the grant (*including cost eligibility, payment schedule, accessory obligations, etc*).

You are also encouraged to visit the [EISMEA](#) website and in particular the [webpage dedicated to this call](#).

1. Background

1.1 Introduction

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are the primary vehicle of innovation in various ecosystems as outlined in the EU's updated Communication on European Industrial Strategy⁵. Whereas they are considered as crucial engines for growth and job creation, their competitiveness is affected by a limited exploitation of international opportunities and innovation prospects in the Single Market and beyond.

In this context, the Single Market Programme (SMP) – SME Pillar 2021-2027 aims to promote growth and to strengthen the competitiveness and sustainability of enterprises in the European Union (EU) and beyond.

The European Innovation Council and SME Executive Agency is entrusted by the European Commission (hereinafter also referred to as the Commission or the EC) with the implementation, *inter alia*, of significant parts of the SMP Programme. In this respect, this call for proposals, managed by EISMEA, contributes to achieving one of the main goals of the SMP - SME Pillar work programme 2024-2027.

The overall objective of this action is to provide assistance to EU SMEs and SMEs from SMP associated countries (hereinafter also referred as target SMEs – see *section 6*) doing business in and with China. On the one hand, China offers many business opportunities,

⁵ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions COM(2021)350 final of 5 May 2021 "[Updating the 2020 New Industrial Strategy: Building a stronger Single Market for Europe's recovery](#)".

on the other one it is challenging. Access to the Chinese market is complex and the regulatory and business environment is changing constantly at fast pace. For this reason, it is necessary to provide appropriate business support services to SMEs and increase their knowledge and awareness on China as well as to support companies in developing trade with, and investment in China.

The purpose of the present call for proposals is to ensure the continuation of the activities of the [EU SME Centre in China](#)⁶ (hereinafter also referred to as the “Centre”) building up the achievements and experience of the Centre, acquired from 2010 until now (i.e. from phase I to phase IV).

1.2. Policy Context

EU actions to support SMEs

The European Commission recognises SMEs as the backbone of Europe's economy. They represent 99,8 % of all businesses in the Union, provide two thirds of jobs and contribute substantially to the creation of new quality jobs in all sectors.

This is why the European Union has implemented over time different initiatives dedicated to the development of SMEs. The comprehensive SME policy framework includes the SME relief package⁷, the EU SME Strategy⁸ and the Small Business Act for Europe (SBA)⁹. Those initiatives support SMEs in the digital and green transitions, boost SMEs' long-term competitiveness and strengthen fairness in the business environment across the Single Market and beyond.

In terms of funded initiatives, the European Union has been supporting SMEs via different actions implemented under different programmes. In the current multiannual financial framework (2021-2027), to contribute to the implementation of the EU SME Strategy and the SME relief package, the European Commission has put forward several actions to be carried out under the SMP – SME Pillar.

One of the main priorities of the SMP – SME pillar is to support enterprises so that they can benefit from the EU Single Market and make the most out of the opportunities offered by markets outside the EU. Moreover, the SMP – SME pillar also provides support to up-scaling activities addressed to SMEs at all crucial stages of their development, including support to internationalisation, uptake of innovation and commercialisation activities.

Specific actions facilitate SME access to markets outside the EU, in particular by providing information about business opportunities and existing barriers to market entry, about public procurement and customs rules and procedures, and by improving business support services in terms of standards and intellectual property rights (IPR) in priority third countries. Those actions complement but do not duplicate the core trade promotion activities of the EU Member States.

⁶ <https://www.eusmecentre.org.cn>

⁷ COM(2023) 535 - Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - SME Relief Package

⁸ COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS 'An SME Strategy for a sustainable and digital Europe'.

⁹ Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions "[An SME Strategy for a sustainable and digital Europe](#)" COM(2020)103 final, and Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions "Think Small First - A "Small Business Act for Europe" COM(2008)394 final.

EU-China economic relationship

The European Union and China are two of the three largest economies and traders in the world. China is the EU's second biggest trading partner behind the United States. Both sides are committed to a comprehensive strategic partnership, as expressed in the EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation.

The 2016 Strategy on China¹⁰ remains a cornerstone of EU engagement, ensuring that relations with this strategic partner are set on a fair, balanced and mutually beneficial course.

The most recent EU policy document on China, "EU-China – A strategic outlook"¹¹, which was endorsed by the European Council in October 2020, aims, inter alia, at achieving a more balanced and reciprocal economic relationship (Action 5) while promoting reciprocity and opening up procurement opportunities in China (Action 6).

In terms of trade, the amounts traded between the EU and China have been growing at a fast pace. China and Europe trade on average over EUR 2 billion a day. In 2023, China was the third largest partner for EU exports of goods (8.8 % of total exports) and the largest partner for EU imports of goods (20.5 %). In 2023 Europe's imports of goods from China have reached the value of EUR 514.4 billion. At the same time, in 2023 the EU exported goods of the value of EUR 223 billion to China. This represents an increase in exports by 65.9% over the past 10 years, whereas imports have grown by 115.3% over the same period. The EU main exports to China are machinery and equipment, motor vehicles, aircraft and chemicals.

At the 21st EU-China Summit held in Brussels in April 2019, both sides committed in a Joint Statement¹² "to ensure equitable and mutually beneficial cooperation in bilateral trade and investment". They reiterate their willingness "to enhance bilateral economic cooperation, trade and investment and to provide each other with broader and more facilitated, non-discriminatory market access".

Concerning investment, at the end of 2022, the cumulative stock of EU investment into China over the past 20 years stood at approximately EUR 170 billion. EU investment in China in 2023 was EUR 9.75 billion, up by 5.5% compared to the previous year. By comparison, China's Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into the EU over the period of 2012-2022 rose to EUR 93.12 billion. In 2023 China invested EUR 7.5 billion into the EU, up by 17.4% compared to the previous year.

The economic relationship between both sides, however, remains unbalanced. EU companies continue to face market access restrictions, technical barriers to trade, and limitations in their participation to procurement procedures or in their access to subsidies and finance. To even the playing field for European companies, the EU has upgraded its toolkit – which includes new country-agnostic instruments such as FDI screening procedures, the international procurement instrument, or the foreign subsidies regulation – in an effort to diminish the effect of certain unfair practices that China and some of its economic operators engage in. The EU is committed to develop a more balanced and reciprocal relationship with China. The EU wants to ensure a mutually beneficial economic relationship through the respect of a level playing field for all companies in line with the rule-based multilateral order and, in particular, regarding intellectual property rights obligations.

¹⁰ JOIN(2016)30 final of 22 June 2016, Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council "Elements for a new EU strategy on China".

¹¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-eu-china-a-strategic-outlook.pdf>.

¹² <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/04/09/joint-statement-of-the-21st-eu-china-summit>.

SMEs and the Chinese market

The Chinese market, notably by its dimension and development, can offer a host of new opportunities for European businesses to reach new markets for their products and services, to broaden their operating scope and diversify their distribution channels through e-commerce and innovative methods of distribution developed in China. However, to successfully penetrate any new market, companies need to overcome many obstacles and face certain risks. These obstacles range from gathering market information, locating suitable partners and finding possible customers, to more complex issues, such as compliance with foreign laws, IPR protection and forced or unwanted technology transfers. Additional issues that affect international business in China are the lack of a level playing field for foreign companies, industrial policies and non-tariff measures that tend to discriminate against foreign and private companies, subsidies and access to financing issues, transparency and predictability in government, rulemaking and enforcement, insufficient protection and enforcement of intellectual property rights.

These obstacles prove especially challenging for SMEs, as they are usually less equipped with in-house expertise and financial or human resources than larger companies. Therefore, they find it very difficult to navigate the different regulations and to identify the ones that apply to their business. Many also need help to assess opportunities and risks correctly. Consequently, a large number of SMEs are not able to engage successfully on the Chinese market for these and other reasons.

Some of the main barriers for China, as identified by SMEs, are the missing knowledge of foreign language, lack of adequate market information, poor access to financing, difficult bureaucratic procedures, different business culture, laws and regulations.

To successfully operate their business in China, SMEs have to gain prior and practical information on the characteristics of the Chinese market, which often differ from the European market, e.g. the strong development of e-commerce and the generalised use of mobile payments (notably through WeChat and AliPay), the various market segments present wherever opportunities arise across the Chinese geography, the specific demand and expectations of Chinese customers, etc.

Therefore, considering the economic potential and size of the Chinese market, the extent of difficulties faced by SMEs in accessing the market and the gaps in existing first-line business support services for SMEs, the European Parliament decided to finance, through a preparatory action, the establishment of an EU Centre for Support to European SMEs (EU SME Centre).

Phase I of the Centre ran from 2010 to 2014 and was followed by phase II running from 2014 until April 2020. These phases were both financed by the European Commission (DG INTPA, previously DG DEVCO) and funded under the ICI+ programme.

Phase III started in October 2020 and ended in June 2022. It was funded by the COSME programme 2014-2020¹³. Phase IV started in July 2022 and is currently ongoing. It is funded by the SMP – SME Pillar¹⁴.

The purpose of the present call for proposals is to carry out phase V of the EU SME Centre in China building up on the achievements of phases I and II, and on the outcomes and activities carried out under phases III and IV. The project has been broadly successful, becoming over the years a widely recognised and consulted online "Knowledge Hub", improving understanding amongst target SMEs about the Chinese market, business

¹³ https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/smes/cosme_en

¹⁴ Phase III was managed by EISMEA (named Executive Agency for SMEs (EASME) until early 2021) in collaboration with the Directorate General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, hereinafter referred to as "DG GROW"). Phase IV is also managed by EISMEA in collaboration with DG GROW.

conditions, opportunities and risks, as well as supporting the activities of EU SMEs planning to do business in China.

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

SMP-COSME-2024-SMECC-01 — EU-SME Centre in China

Objectives

The overall objective of this call for proposals is to ensure the continuation of the EU SME Centre in China. The latter must provide a first line of advice to target SMEs, namely SMEs operating in China or willing to enter this market, to increase and diversify their knowledge on acquisition, exports, imports and investments. In this regard, during phase V the Centre will continue to offer a set of business support services to help target SMEs overcome barriers and constraints they face in their efforts to enter, stay, or de-risk from the Chinese market.

The EU SME Centre in China is expected to reach a wide audience and to develop its activities vis-à-vis SMEs from EU and SMP associated countries. During phase V the Centre is expected to further extend its outreach.

EISMEA and the concerned European Commission services of DG GROW will facilitate the transition from phase IV to phase V, including the access to results and tools that are necessary to implement the project funded under this call.

The EU SME Centre in China - phase V will not only further develop the activities of previous phases, especially the ones carried out in the most recent phase IV, but will also provide new business support services that reflect, on the one hand, the needs of SMEs in the post COVID-19 pandemic and, on the other hand, the current EU policy priorities and the state of EU-China economic relations.

Thus, the specific objectives of this call for proposals are:

- Assisting target SMEs to identify the most suitable EU and non-EU (i.e. from Member States and SMP associated countries – see *section 6*) business support organisations (hereinafter also referred to as “BSOs”), trade promotion organisation (hereinafter also referred to as “TPOs”) and other service providers at their disposal, that can provide target SMEs with the most appropriate support;
- Assessing target SMEs’ readiness towards establishing and developing their commercial presence on the Chinese market and providing suitable advice on their level of preparedness to internationalise;
- Assisting target SMEs to establish and develop a sustainable commercial presence on the Chinese market (through knowledge acquisition, exports, imports and investments);
- Developing better knowledge of the industrial and business environment in China, especially on key sectors, through training programmes, analytical and advisory activities (reports, studies, seminars, workshops, webinars), business information and logistic support;
- Advising target SMEs on the risks and opportunities of the Chinese market so that they can take informed decisions on envisaged business relations with Chinese partners;
- Improving synergies and best practice sharing among EU (and when applicable non-

EU) BSOs/TPOs at European, national and regional level, with the ultimate goal of helping the target SMEs established or intending to do business in China;

- Creating or further developing synergies with other EU funded actions in a “Team Europe” fashion, offering, where relevant, joint/complementary business services with an integrated approach. In particular, cooperation with the China IP SME Helpdesk¹⁵ should be seamless;
- Strengthening European advocacy for EU and SMP associated countries’ business communities, in particular SMEs, in relation to their business activities in China;
- Advising target SMEs already operating in China on how to de-risk their operations, including providing support for SMEs willing to exit the market, in a sustainable way.

Themes and priorities (scope)

Under this call for proposals, the phase V of the Centre will continue to provide general business and legal support services, will offer information about market opportunities and market conditions in China and will provide networking opportunities with relevant potential partners to SMEs with a desire to enter or expand their operations in China.

The scope of this call for proposals is:

1. Ensuring the business continuity of the Centre throughout the project.
2. Offering in-person, online or hybrid business support services considering their impact in terms of active participation and effectiveness. Experience acquired during the COVID-19 pandemic can serve as a benchmark.
3. Identifying new challenges as well as new barriers for SMEs considering expanding their business or operating in the Chinese market, including those related to de-risking and market exit. Dedicated activities to help companies adapt to new market conditions shall be proposed.
4. Whilst maintaining a generalist approach as SMEs’ “first point of contact”, the Centre shall also focus on a limited set of pre-identified relevant economic sectors to continue improving the offer of value-added services at the disposal of target SMEs (see mandatory activities below under section *Activities that can be funded*). These economic sectors shall correspond to the priorities of the Commission, including those linked to the green and digital transitions.
5. Ensuring that the activities of the Centre are coherent with the broader EU-China strategy, in particular the EU’s supply chain resilience, economic security and de-risking priorities.
6. Promoting coordination and developing fruitful cooperation and synergies with other EU-funded actions (in particular with the China IP SME Helpdesk, the Enterprise Europe Network and the European Cluster Collaboration Platform), EU policy initiatives and other European players (e.g. National Trade Promotion Organisations, Chambers of Commerce, cluster organisations) both in China and in the EU.
7. Facilitating direct contacts and networking among and with target SMEs, to support exchange of best practices, cooperation and “Team Europe” spirit.
8. Advocating on behalf of target SMEs, by collaborating with relevant stakeholders via oral and written contributions, and by reporting to DG GROW on market access

¹⁵ <https://www.ipr-hub.eu>.

trends and challenges faced by target SMEs in China.

9. Improving the Centre’s role as SMEs’ “first point of contact” in China via an effective outreach and communication strategy.

Among the target SMEs, special attention shall be given to SMEs from EU Member States and SMP associated countries, which are not present or do not have significant resources in China.

Activities that can be funded (scope)

The selected consortium is expected to put in place a robust and varied set of activities to achieve the above-mentioned objectives and deliver the expected results in accordance with the established themes and priorities. Applicants are encouraged to propose other innovative activities, which can increase the added-value of the services offered by the Centre.

All activities must be implemented, amongst others, in compliance with the applicable data protection rules.

The following paragraphs provide a **mandatory but non-exhaustive list of activities**, which shall be carried out to meet some of the themes and priorities (scope) mentioned in the previous section. For some other themes and priorities applicants are requested to propose the most suitable activities. If applicants deem it possible, they can propose activities that meet more themes/priorities.

1. Ensuring the business continuity of the Centre throughout the project.

A primary activity of the Centre will be the management and continuous update and upgrade of the Centre’s website, a comprehensive online platform accessible by all target SMEs and interested stakeholders. The website shall:

- Help raise awareness and knowledge among target SMEs on China’s large and complex market;
- Provide updated general market entry services and basic legal advice, including information about Chinese technical regulations, standards and financing available, as well as intellectual property matters in close collaboration with the China IP SME Helpdesk;
- Provide a user-friendly direct contact with the Centre, including with the Centre’s staff, both for general enquiries about the services provided by the Centre and for guidance concerning other BSOs/TPOs that might be best placed to reply to their queries and provide assistance;
- Store and share (authorised) recordings of events, training, workshops, webinars as well as related information material (slides, working documents, etc.);
- Establish a “one working day maximum” response delay to simple enquiries received via the Centre’s website, and in particular to enquires related to services that can best be provided by other EU and SMP associated countries organisations with which the Centre has partnerships and close cooperation.

As soon as the Grant Agreement implementation starts, the successful consortium will be given the rights of use of the major outcomes generated throughout phase IV and, if necessary, through previous phases of the Centre. Besides, the consortium will be granted

access to and will take over the management of the [Centre's website](#) currently managed by the beneficiaries carrying out phase IV. A handover meeting will be organised with the support of EISMEA, DG GROW and the EU Delegation to China.

The business support offered by the Centre will complement the activities of BSOs, TPOs and/or national Chambers in China of EU Member States and SMP associated countries. In this regard, it will provide target SMEs with first line information about the Chinese market, including information about other business support organisations which may better assist them with more specialised services. The Centre will therefore redirect target SMEs to national BSOs/TPOs (when present in China) or to other public or private entities.

2. Offering in-person, online or hybrid business support services considering their impact in terms of active participation and effectiveness. Experience acquired during the COVID-19 pandemic can serve as a benchmark.

- Organising webinars, training sessions, roadshows and other events, which facilitate knowledge acquisition and networking among target SMEs;
- Giving target SMEs broad access to publications and any kind of supporting material and recording of training sessions and webinars on how to develop business in China;
- Informing target SMEs about events and training sessions on China organised by other BSOs/TPOs or by entities from EU Member States or SMP associated countries to which they can participate as well as about relevant publications;
- Maintaining an up-to-date list of trade fairs in China that are relevant to SMEs, including information on likely attendance and outcomes that could realistically be expected;
- Providing advice and/or conducting initial due diligence on potential business partners.

3. Identifying new challenges as well as the existence of new barriers for SMEs considering expanding their business or operating in the Chinese market, including those related to de-risking and market exit. Dedicated activities to help companies adapt to new market conditions shall be proposed.

- Gathering, compiling, analysing and translating information about the Chinese market that is relevant to target SMEs, while prioritising selected sectors;
- Developing expertise and providing advice on matters related to de-risking of SME supply chains, including providing guidance compilation of good practice and resources to support market exit when requested by the target SMEs, adapted to their specific ecosystems when necessary.

4. Whilst maintaining a generalist approach as SMEs' "first point of contact", the Centre shall also focus on a limited set of pre-identified relevant economic sectors to continue improving the offer of value-added services at the disposal of target SMEs. These economic sectors shall correspond to the priorities of the Commission, including those linked to the green and digital transitions.

- Applicants must outline in their proposal the activities dedicated to the pre-identified relevant economic sectors. Minimum one activity per year must be carried out.

- The relevance of pre-identified economic sectors shall be justified and validated by EISMEA and shall not run counter to the EU's industrial strategy and open strategic autonomy drives. Special consideration will be given to those focus areas that align with the EU's policy priorities, including the twin digital and green transformations.
- If possible, activities under this point shall be organised in collaboration with EU and SMP associated countries' BSOs/TPOs. Should the economic or political priorities of the EU change during the implementation of the project, the proposed choice can be re-evaluated in consultation with EISMEA.

5. Ensuring that the activities of the Centre are coherent with the broader EU-China strategy, in particular the EU's supply chain resilience, economic security and de-risking priorities.

- Applicants must specify in their proposal how they will make sure that their activities will be coherent with the broader EU-China strategy during the whole duration of the project and which activities will be dedicated to the priorities.

6. Promoting coordination and developing fruitful cooperation and synergies with other EU-funded actions (in particular with the China IP SME Helpdesk), EU policy initiatives and other European players (e.g. National Trade Promotion Organisations, Chambers of Commerce) both in China and in the EU.

- Applicants must describe how they will create synergies with other EU-funded actions and which other European players they intend to cooperate with to maximise the outreach of the project and offer to target SMEs integrated business support services. Minimum one activity per year must be carried out.

7. Facilitating direct contacts and networking among and with target SMEs, to support exchange of best practices, cooperation and "Team Europe" spirit.

- Applicants must describe how they can help target SMEs to network and exchange experience.

8. Advocating on behalf of target SMEs, by collaborating with relevant stakeholders via oral and written contributions, and by reporting to DG GROW on market access trends and challenges faced by target SMEs in China.

- Facilitating the networking among existing BSOs and TPOs in China and in the EU / SMP associated countries, as well as among target SMEs currently in China or looking to enter the Chinese market, to exchange and promote best practices;
- Providing advocacy and advocacy-related contributions to local EU Delegation-led initiatives on market access in China and EU-led negotiations in the trade and investment areas. If requested, providing inputs to relevant initiatives by private-led stakeholders, for instance the European Chamber of Commerce in China;
- In addition to the reports linked to the contractual obligations of the Grant Agreement, providing EISMEA and DG GROW with feedback and relevant information about the challenges faced by target SMEs assisted by the Centre, as well as about success stories on a regular basis. This should contribute to the update of EU policies and/or support actions;

- Feeding analysis and substance into the EU-China industrial and regulatory dialogues as well as other relevant fora.

Applicants may provide examples of existing partnerships with BSOs/TPOs based in the EU, SMP associated countries or China which they are involved in and which may be relevant in the framework of this call for proposals.

9. Assuming more publicly the role of SMEs' "first point of contact" via an effective outreach and communication strategy.

- Applicants are requested to provide, as an annex to their proposal, a detailed outreach and communication strategy covering the entire duration of the project. The template is available on the EISMEA [webpage dedicated to this call](#) for proposals.
- The strategy shall:
 - describe the proposed methodology for the identification of the target SMEs and clearly lay out a set of activities and concrete actions that will be undertaken to reach them;
 - ensure an accurate communication to raise awareness of the services provided by the Centre, as well as of those that are better provided by other EU's and/or SMP associated countries' BSOs/TPOs;.
 - explain how the Centre will establish and/or strengthen partnerships with business networks and BSOs/TPOs based in the EU and in SMP associated countries, including any relevant pan-European networks and the IP SME Helpdesk in China;
 - include an indicative list (some examples) of relevant fairs and events in China, in the EU or SMP associated countries to promote the Centre and its services and meet target SMEs and other relevant stakeholders. Those occurrences should also offer the chance to organise B2B meetings or facilitate first contact with potential Chinese business partners.

Deliverables

The above mandatory activities shall lead to the following mandatory (type of) deliverables:

1. New and updated published reports focusing on specific sectors/segments of the Chinese market, on the legal framework of the Chinese market, etc. etc.);
2. Business articles and analysis;
3. Policy environment reports;
4. Update and upgrade of the project website, where companies have access to relevant information, publications and videos giving practical advice on how to develop durably their presence on the Chinese market;
5. Update and upgrade of the self-diagnosis tool;
6. Update and upgrade of the FAQs database;
7. In-person/hybrid/online webinars and workshops;

8. Technical assistance to target SMEs and BSOs/TPOs, including an “ask-the-expert” service providing first-line answers to more specific questions, and a fast-response helpdesk to help users identify the most suitable BSO/TPO or any other player for specific queries and/or tailor-made services;
9. Organisation of B2B events and participation in trade fairs and roadshows;
10. Activities focussing on the identified relevant sectors;
11. Bi-monthly meeting of the inter-Chamber SME working group / an annual report of the advocacy actions undertaken by the Centre.

Consortium shall add additional deliverables on the basis of their proposal. Overall number of deliverables shall be reasonable and reflect the proposed activities.

The proposed submission date of the different deliverables must take into account not only the time needed to complete an activity but also the time needed to report its impact or to provide any additional information.

After the end of the project, any potential successor Centre shall be able to reuse all the results and deliverables of the Centre, in addition to EISMEA, the DG GROW and the European Union¹⁶.

Upon request, results must be readily available in a generally usable, editable format (MS Office or comparable).

Expected impact

Performance indicators

The performance of the selected consortium shall be measured based on the following indicators:

- Number of contacts of the EU SME Centre in China for information and advice purposes;
- Number of SME enquiries (breakdown per country and sector/topic);
- Number of regulatory issues or market access barriers reported affecting specifically SMEs;
- Number of referrals of target SMEs to other support organisations;
- Number of SMEs satisfied with the services provided (e.g. testimonials, post-service customer evaluations, etc.);
- Number of persons/SMEs trained through webinars, workshops and other activities;
- Number of updated and new publications, such as reports and articles, (and number of downloads);
- Number of recipients of the Centre’s newsletters;
- Number of events organised both in the EU and SMP associated countries and in

¹⁶ Ref. Article 16 of the grant agreement and its Annex 5, in line with the Commission Re-use [Directive \(EU\) 2019/1024](#)

China to inform target SMEs;

- Number of participants in the above-mentioned events;
- Number of activities organised focussing on the pre-identified relevant economic sectors;
- Number of partnerships/synergies/joint activities developed with other business support organisations in the EU, in SMP associated countries and in China;
- Number of activities organised/attended to facilitate the networking between existing business support organisations in China and in the EU / SMP associated countries, and to facilitate networking between target SMEs.

By the end of the project, phase V of the EU-SME Centre in China is expected to achieve the following **results**:

- Improving the general knowledge and awareness among target SMEs of the risks and opportunities and of the framework conditions of the Chinese market as well as of prospects and relevant challenges for target SMEs intending to start, expand, or de-risk their business in or with China. The activities of the Centre shall be carried out with full awareness and in full respect of the wider contemporary EU-China Strategy.
- Strengthening the coordination/synergies with similar actions for SMEs in China and in the EU / SMP associated countries, as appropriate. The Centre shall also support European business advocacy, especially for the benefit of target SMEs.
- Reaching a large number of SMEs, in a systematic and integrated way, with particular but not exclusive focus on those SMEs having limited prospects of receiving support from national BSOs/TPOs in China. Additionally, it will support EU business community driven advocacy for SMEs in close cooperation with the EU Chambers of Commerce in China.

Developing active partnerships with intermediary BSOs/TPOs based in the EU and in SMP associated countries to ensure sufficient outreach and marketing of its services to SMEs, in particular target SMEs having no operations in China or that may be unaware of the services of the SME Centre.

3. Available budget

The estimated available call budget is **EUR 2 700 000**.

We expect to fund 1 project.

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

4. Timetable and deadlines

Timetable and deadlines (indicative)	
Call opening:	24 October 2024
<u>Deadline for submission:</u>	<u>15 January 2025 – 17:00:00 CET</u> (Brussels)
Evaluation:	February 2025
Information on evaluation results:	March 2025
GA signature:	June 2025
Indicative starting date of the project:	1 July 2025

5. Admissibility and documents

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

Proposals must be submitted **electronically** via the Funding & Tenders Portal Electronic Submission System (accessible via the Topic page in the [Search Funding & Tenders](#) section). Paper submissions are NOT possible.

Proposals (including annexes and supporting documents) must be submitted using the forms provided *inside* the Submission System (⚠ NOT the documents available on the Topic page — they are only for information).

Proposals must be **complete** and contain all the requested information and all required annexes and supporting documents:

- **Application Form Part A** — contains administrative information about the participants (future coordinator, beneficiaries and affiliated entities) and the summarised budget for the project (*to be filled in directly online*)
- **Application Form Part B** — contains the technical description of the project (*to be downloaded from the Portal Submission System, completed, and then assembled and re-uploaded as PDF in the system*)
- **Mandatory annexes and supporting documents** (*templates available to be downloaded, completed, assembled and re-uploaded*):
 - **detailed budget table/calculator** (*mandatory Excel template available in the Submission System, and to be submitted as an Excel file*)¹⁷;
 - **CVs** (short outlines) of core project team (*see also section 7, operational capacity*)
 - activity reports of last year: not applicable
 - **list of previous projects** (key projects for the last 4 years) (*template available in Application Form Part B, see also section 7, operational capacity*)

¹⁷ Please carefully read the instructions on how to fill in the detailed budget table.

- **Outreach and communication strategy** – maximum 15 pages (*mandatory template available on the [webpage dedicated to this call](#) on EISMEA website*).

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

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

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

Proposals are limited to a maximum of **50 pages** (Part B). Evaluators will not consider any additional pages.

You may be asked at a later stage for further documents (*for legal entity validation, financial capacity check, bank account validation, etc*).



For more information about the submission process (including IT aspects), consult the [Online Manual](#).

6. Eligibility

Applications will only be considered eligible if their content corresponds wholly (or at least in part) to the topic description for which they are submitted.

Eligible participants (eligible countries)

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

- be legal entities (public or private bodies)
- be established in one of the eligible countries, i.e.:
 - EU Member States (including overseas countries and territories (OCTs))
 - non-EU countries:
 - listed EEA countries and countries associated to the Single Market Programme ([list of participating countries](#))
 - China, pursuant to Article 9 (2) (c) of the SMP Regulation¹⁸

¹⁸ Regulation (EU) 2021/690, Article 9 (2) Eligible entities:

Subject to the eligibility conditions laid down in paragraphs 3 to 7, the following entities shall be eligible under the Programme: [...] (c) exceptionally, legal entities established in a third country which is not associated to the Programme, provided that the participation of those legal entities in the action falls within the objectives of the Programme and the activities outside the Union contribute to the effectiveness of interventions carried out in Member State territories to which the Treaties apply.

- be business support organisations (BSO) and/or trade promotion organisations (TPO):
 - representing groups of companies from EU Member States and SMP associated countries, including Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), and/or
 - representing business economic interests of EU or SMP associated countries and offering in the first instance non-individualised services for promoting trade and investment between Europe and China.

Typically, applicants can be (non-exhaustive list):

- bilateral or European Chambers of commerce,
- sector specific trade organisations,
- industrial and professional associations,
- employers' federations,
- business intermediary non-governmental organisations,
- sector specific agencies supporting SMEs in their trade,
- entities supporting investment or commercial activities.

Beneficiaries and affiliated entities must register in the [Participant Register](#) — before submitting the proposal — and will have to be validated by the Central Validation Service (REA Validation). For the validation, they will be requested to upload documents showing legal status and origin.

Other entities may participate in other consortium roles, such as associated partners, subcontractors, third parties giving in-kind contributions, etc (*see section 13*).

Specific cases

Exceptional funding — Entities from other countries (not listed above) are exceptionally eligible if the granting authority considers their participation essential for the implementation of the action.

Natural persons — Natural persons are NOT eligible (with the exception of self-employed persons, i.e. sole traders, where the company does not have legal personality separate from that of the natural person).

International organisations — International organisations are eligible. The rules on eligible countries do not apply to them.

Entities without legal personality — Entities which do not have legal personality under their national law may exceptionally participate, provided that their representatives have the capacity to undertake legal obligations on their behalf and offer guarantees for the protection of the EU financial interests equivalent to that offered by legal persons¹⁹.

EU bodies — EU bodies (with the exception of the European Commission Joint Research Centre) can NOT be part of the consortium.

¹⁹ See Article 200(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

Associations and interest groupings — Entities composed of members may participate as 'sole beneficiaries' or 'beneficiaries without legal personality'²⁰. ⚠ Please note that if the action will be implemented by the members, they should also participate (either as beneficiaries or as affiliated entities, otherwise their costs will NOT be eligible).

Countries currently negotiating association agreements — Beneficiaries from countries with ongoing negotiations for participation in the programme (see *list of participating countries above*) may participate in the call and can sign grants if the negotiations are concluded before grant signature and if the association covers the call (i.e. is retroactive and covers both the part of the programme and the year when the call was launched).

EU restrictive measures — Special rules apply for certain entities (e.g. entities subject to [EU restrictive measures](#) under Article 29 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) and Article 215 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU)²¹). Such entities are not eligible to participate in any capacity, including as beneficiaries, affiliated entities, associated partners, subcontractors or recipients of financial support to third parties (if any).

Following the [Council Implementing Decision \(EU\) 2022/2506](#), as of 16 December 2022, no legal commitments (including the grant agreement itself as well as subcontracts, purchase contracts, financial support to third parties etc.) can be signed with Hungarian public interest trusts established under [Hungarian Act IX of 2021](#) or any entity they maintain. Affected entities may continue to apply to calls for proposals. However, in case the Council measures are not lifted, such entities are not eligible to participate in any funded role (beneficiaries, affiliated entities, sub-contractors, recipients of financial support to third parties). In this case, co-applicants will be invited to remove or replace that entity and/or to change its status into associated partner. Tasks and budget may be redistributed accordingly.

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

Consortium composition

Proposals must be submitted by a consortium of **at least four [4] applicants** (beneficiaries; not affiliated entities), which complies with the following conditions:

- minimum **two [2] entities (BSO or TPO)** must be **established in the EU, in two [2] different Member States** and
- minimum **two [2] entities (BSO or TPO)** must be **established in China**.

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*).

²⁰ For the definitions, see Articles 190(2) and 200(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

²¹ 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](#).

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.

Geographic location (target countries)

Proposals must relate to activities taking place in the eligible countries (*see above*).

Duration

Projects should normally last 36 months, as from 1 July 2025.

Extensions are possible, if duly justified and through an amendment.

Project budget

Project budget (maximum grant amount) is expected to be around EUR 2 700 000 per project.

This does not however preclude the submission/selection of proposals requesting other amounts. The grant awarded may be lower than the amount requested.

7. Financial and operational capacity and exclusion

Financial capacity

Applicants must have **stable and sufficient resources** to successfully implement the projects and contribute their share. Organisations participating in several projects must have sufficient capacity to implement all these projects.

The financial capacity check will be carried out on the basis of the documents you will be requested to upload in the [Participant Register](#) during grant preparation (*e.g. profit and loss account and balance sheet, business plan, audit report produced by an approved external auditor, certifying the accounts for the last closed financial year, etc*). The analysis will be based on neutral financial indicators, but will also take into account other aspects, such as dependency on EU funding and deficit and revenue in previous years.

The check will normally be done for all beneficiaries, except:

- public bodies (entities established as public body under national law, including local, regional or national authorities) or international organisations;
- if the individual requested grant amount is not more than EUR 60 000.

If needed, it may also be done for affiliated entities.

If we consider that your financial capacity is not satisfactory, we may require:

- further information;
- an enhanced financial responsibility regime, i.e. joint and several responsibility for all beneficiaries or joint and several liability of affiliated entities (*see below, section 10*)

- 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 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).

In particular, the consortium shall demonstrate to have the following minimum expertise:

- At least **four (4) members of the project team**, possibly **equally distributed** between the **partners based in China** and the ones **based in the EU/SMP associated countries** must have **at least five (5) years of experience in managing EU/transnational projects**, both in terms of grant management and project coordination;
- **All core members of the project team responsible of action tasks** (i.e. services to SMEs, publications, synergies with other EU funded initiatives/BSOs/TPOs, advocacy, etc.) must have **at least three (3) years of experience in one or more of the following fields**: business support services (especially to SMEs), internationalisation (preferably with focus on EU-China trade relations), Intellectual Property, Chinese legal and economic framework, training activities for companies, advocacy and communication, including event management.

This capacity will be assessed together within the “Quality – project team and cooperation arrangements” award criterion, on the basis of the competences 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:

- **CV (short outlines)/profiles** (qualifications and experience) of all the core project staff responsible for managing and implementing the project (including staff providing administrative and/or technical support). CVs/profiles must demonstrate the above-mentioned requirements and include at least the following information: academic and professional background, areas of expertise and years of experience in any given area, experience and role in comparable projects; language knowledge.
 - ➔ *Free format, i.e. no template is provided. However, it is highly recommended to use the same CV/profile format for all proposed project team members.*
 - ➔ *Applicants are requested to duly fill in the “recap table” of the project team in*

section 2.3 of Application Form Part B.

- **Description of all consortium participants (applicant entities)**, with a particular focus on the experience, knowledge, expertise and skills relevant to this action.
→ *Please duly fill in section 2.2 of the Application Form Part B.*
- **List of previous projects** (key projects from the last 4 years). Applicants must provide a short description of each project they were involved in, including the budget, the hyperlink to it (if available) and the main results (if available), and indicate their role in the project.
→ *Mandatory table already included as an Annex to the Application Form Part B.*
- **If relevant, a description of the technical equipment, tools or facilities and patents** at the disposal of the applicant for the implementation of the proposal. This information is to be included in the *appropriate section of the Application Form Part B.*

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

Exclusion

Applicants which are subject to an **EU exclusion decision** or in one of the following **exclusion situations** that bar them from receiving EU funding can NOT participate²²:

- 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 misconduct²³ (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant);
- committed fraud, corruption, links to a criminal organisation, money laundering, terrorism-related crimes (including terrorism financing), child labour or human trafficking (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant);
- shown significant deficiencies in complying with main obligations under an EU procurement contract, grant agreement, prize, expert contract, or similar (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant);
- guilty of irregularities within the meaning of Article 1(2) of EU Regulation [2988/95](#) (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or

²² See Articles 138 and 143 of EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

²³ 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.

control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant);

- created under a different jurisdiction with the intent to circumvent fiscal, social or other legal obligations in the country of origin or created another entity with this purpose (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant).

Applicants will also be rejected if it turns out that²⁴:

- during the award procedure they misrepresented information required as a condition for participating or failed to supply that information
- they were previously involved in the preparation of the call and this entails a distortion of competition that cannot be remedied otherwise (conflict of interest).

8. Evaluation and award procedure

The proposals will have to follow the **standard submission and evaluation procedure** (one-stage submission + one-step evaluation).

An **evaluation committee** (assisted by independent outside experts) will assess all applications.


Proposals will first be checked for formal requirements (admissibility, and eligibility, see *sections 5 and 6*). Proposals found admissible and eligible will be evaluated against the operational capacity and award criteria (*see sections 7 and 9*) and then ranked according to their scores.

For proposals with the same score (within a topic or budget envelope) a **priority order** will be determined according to the following approach:

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

- 1) The *ex aequo* proposals within the same topic 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".
- 2) If this does not allow to determine the priority, a further prioritisation can be done by considering the overall project portfolio and the creation of positive synergies between projects, or other factors related to the objectives of the call. These factors will be documented in the panel report.

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

 No commitment for funding — Invitation to grant preparation does NOT constitute a formal commitment for funding. We will still need to make various legal checks before grant award: *legal entity validation, financial capacity, exclusion check, etc.*

²⁴ See Article 143 EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

Grant preparation will involve a dialogue in order to fine-tune technical or financial aspects of the project and may require extra information from your side. It may also include adjustments to the proposal to address recommendations of the evaluation committee or other concerns. Compliance will be a pre-condition for signing the grant.

If you believe that the evaluation procedure was flawed, you can submit a **complaint** (following the deadlines and procedures set out in the evaluation result letter). Please note that notifications which have not been opened within 10 days after sending will be considered to have been accessed and that deadlines will be counted from opening/access (see also [Funding & Tenders Portal Terms and Conditions](#)). Please also be aware that for complaints submitted electronically, there may be character limitations.

9. Award criteria

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

- 1. Relevance:** Clarity and consistency of the project as a whole, of proposed activities and planning; extent to which they match the themes, priorities and objectives of the call; European/trans-national dimension and overall European added value of the proposal; extent to which the proposed activities meet the needs of target SMEs and other stakeholders; possibility to use the results beyond the project; appropriateness of the proposed partnership/synergies with relevant stakeholders and multipliers; complementarities with other EU funded actions and potential to develop mutual trust; contribution to the EU strategic and legislative context; impact/interest for a number of countries (EU or eligible non-EU countries) **(30 points)**
- 2. Quality:**
 - **Project design and implementation:** technical quality; logical links between the identified problems/needs and solutions proposed (logical frame concept); robustness of the proposed activities; innovative approach, if any; methodology for implementing the project (proposed management of the project and of the resources, procedures, risk management, internal monitoring); feasibility of the project within the proposed time frame; cost effectiveness (sufficient/appropriate budget for proper implementation; best value for money, allocation of resources per work package/task) **(30 points)**
 - **Project team and cooperation arrangements:** suitability of the consortium as a whole to implement the project and reach the objectives of the call; quality of the consortium and of the project team(s); allocation of responsibilities among the consortium partners according to their skills/competencies/planned contribution to the project; appropriate/efficient procedures and problem-solving mechanisms for cooperating within the project team(s) and consortium **(30 points)**
- 3. Impact:** Ambition and expected long-term impact of results on target groups/general public; extent to which the proposed impact indicators are realistic and measurable; effectiveness of the proposed activities, including the outreach and communication strategy; 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	16	30
Quality — Project design and implementation	16	30
Quality — Project team and cooperation arrangements	16	30
Impact	6	10
Overall (pass) scores	70	100

Maximum points: 100 points.

Individual thresholds per criterion: 16/30, 16/30, 16/30 and 6/10 points.

Overall threshold: 70 points.

Proposals that pass the individual thresholds AND the overall threshold will be considered for funding — within the limits of the available budget (i.e. up to the budget ceiling). Other proposals will be rejected.

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

If you pass evaluation, your project will be invited for grant preparation, where you will be asked to prepare the Grant Agreement together with the EU Project Officer.

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

The Model Grant Agreement that will be used (and all other relevant templates and guidance documents) can be found on [Portal Reference Documents](#).

Starting date and project duration

The project starting date and duration will be fixed in the Grant Agreement (*Data Sheet, point 1*). Normally the starting date will be after grant signature. A retroactive starting date can be granted exceptionally for duly justified reasons — but never earlier than the proposal submission date.

Project duration: *see section 6 above*.

The indicative starting date of the project is 1 July 2025.

Milestones and deliverables

The milestones and deliverables for each project will be managed through the Portal Grant Management System and will be reflected in Annex 1 of the Grant Agreement.

Mandatory deliverables are mentioned in section 2.

Form of grant, funding rate and maximum grant amount

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

Project budget (maximum grant amount): *see section 6 above*.

The grant will be a budget-based mixed actual cost grant (actual costs, with unit cost and flat-rate elements). This means that it will reimburse ONLY certain types of costs (eligible costs) and costs that were *actually* incurred for your project (NOT the *budgeted* costs). For unit costs and flat-rates, you can charge the amounts calculated as explained in the Grant Agreement (*see art 6 and Annex 2 and 2a*).

The costs will be reimbursed at the funding rate fixed in the Grant Agreement (**90%**).

The grant awarded may be lower than the amount requested.

Grants may NOT produce a profit (i.e., surplus of revenues + EU grant over costs). For-profit organisations must declare their revenues and, if there is a profit, we will deduct it from the final grant amount (*see art 22.3*).

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

Budget categories and cost eligibility rules

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

Budget categories for this call:

- A. Personnel costs
 - A.1 Employees, A.2 Natural persons under direct contract, A.3 Seconded persons
 - A.4 SME owners and natural person beneficiaries
- B. Subcontracting costs
- C. Purchase costs
 - C.1 Travel and subsistence
 - C.2 Equipment
 - C.3 Other goods, works and services
- D. Other cost categories: not applicable
- E. Indirect costs

Specific cost eligibility conditions for this call:

- personnel costs:

- SME owner/natural person unit cost²⁵: Yes
- travel and subsistence unit cost²⁶: Yes
- equipment costs: depreciation
- other cost categories:
 - costs for financial support to third parties: not allowed.
- indirect cost flat-rate: 7% of the eligible direct costs (categories A-D, except volunteers costs and exempted specific cost categories, if any)
- VAT: non-deductible VAT is eligible (but please note that since 2013 VAT paid by beneficiaries that are public bodies acting as public authority is NOT eligible)
- other:
 - in-kind contributions for free are allowed, but cost-neutral, i.e. they cannot be declared as cost;
 - kick-off meeting: costs for kick-off meeting organised by the granting authority are eligible 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, except of course for the Centre's own website.
 - other ineligible costs: No

Reporting and payment arrangements


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

After grant signature, you will normally receive a **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/financial guarantee (if required) — whichever is the latest.

There will be one or more **interim payments** (with detailed cost reporting, half way through the project).

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).

²⁵ Commission [Decision](#) of 20 October 2020 authorising the use of unit costs for the personnel costs of the owners of small and medium-sized enterprises and beneficiaries that are natural persons not receiving a salary for the work carried out by themselves under an action or work programme (C(2020)7115).

²⁶ Commission [Decision](#) of 31 July 2024 amending Commission Decision C(2021)35 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(2024)5405).

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.

A project review of this action might be also conducted. If so, the consortium implementing the Centre shall cooperate with EISMEA staff or with the external experts identified by EISMEA by providing them with any information requested which is relevant, reasonable, and necessary for the evaluation of the Centre's performance as provided for in the grant agreement.

Prefinancing guarantees

If a prefinancing guarantee is required, it will be fixed in the Grant Agreement (*Data Sheet, point 4*). The amount will be set during grant preparation and it will normally be equal or lower than the 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 normally requested from the coordinator, for the consortium. They must be provided during the grant preparation, 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 Grant Agreement (*art 23*).

Certificates

Depending on the type of action, size of grant amount and type of beneficiaries, you may be requested to submit different certificates. The types, schedules and thresholds for each certificate are fixed in the Grant Agreement (*Data Sheet, point 4 and art 24*).

Liability regime for recoveries

The liability regime for recoveries will be fixed in the Grant Agreement (*Data Sheet point 4.4 and art 22*).

For beneficiaries, it is one of the following:

- limited joint and several liability with individual ceilings — *each beneficiary up to their maximum grant amount*
- unconditional joint and several liability — *each beneficiary up to the maximum grant amount for the action*

or

- individual financial responsibility — *each beneficiary only for their own debts*.

In addition, the granting authority may require joint and several liability of affiliated entities (with their beneficiary).

Provisions concerning the project implementation

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

- list of background: No
- rights of use on results: Yes for EISMEA, the EU and potential successor Centre
- 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: Yes

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

- specific rules for PPI Grants for Procurement: No
- specific rules for blending operations: No

Other specificities

n/a

Non-compliance and breach of contract

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



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

11. How to submit an application

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

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

a) create a user account and register your organisation

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

Once you have an 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 proposal**

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

Submit your proposal in 3 parts, as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

12. Help

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

- [Online Manual](#)
- Topic Q&A on the Topic page (for call-specific questions in open calls; not applicable for actions by invitation)
- [Portal FAQ](#) (for general questions).

Please also consult the Topic page regularly since we will use it to publish call updates. (For invitations, we will contact you directly in case of a call update).

Contact

For individual questions on the Portal Submission System, please contact the [IT Helpdesk](#).

Non-IT related questions should be sent to the following email address at the latest **3 working days before the call deadline** (see section 4) to: EISMEA-SMP-COSME-ENQUIRIES@ec.europa.eu.

Please indicate clearly the reference of the call and topic to which your question relates (see cover page).

13. Important



IMPORTANT

- **Don't wait until the end** — Complete your application sufficiently in advance of the deadline to avoid any last minute **technical problems**. Problems due to last minute submissions (*e.g., congestion, etc*) will be entirely at your risk. Call deadlines can NOT be extended.
- **Consult** the Portal Topic page regularly. We will use it to publish updates and additional information on the call (call and topic updates).
- **Funding & Tenders Portal Electronic Exchange System** — By submitting the application, all participants **accept** to use the electronic exchange system in accordance with the [Portal Terms & Conditions](#).
- **Registration** — Before submitting the application, all beneficiaries, affiliated entities and associated partners must be registered in the [Participant Register](#). The participant identification code (PIC) (one per participant) is mandatory for the Application Form.
- **Consortium roles** — When setting up your consortium, you should think of organisations that help you reach objectives and solve problems.

The roles should be attributed according to the level of participation in the project. Main participants should participate as **beneficiaries** or **affiliated entities**; other entities can participate as **associated partners**, subcontractors, third parties giving in-kind contributions. **Associated partners** and third parties giving in-kind contributions should bear their own costs (they will not become formal recipients of EU funding). **Subcontracting** should normally constitute a limited part and must be performed by third parties (not by one of the beneficiaries/affiliated entities). Subcontracting going beyond 30% of the total eligible costs must be justified in the application.

- **Coordinator** — In multi-beneficiary grants, the beneficiaries participate as consortium (group of beneficiaries). They will have to choose a coordinator, who will take care of the project management and coordination and will represent the consortium towards the granting authority. In mono-beneficiary grants, the single beneficiary will automatically be coordinator.
- **Affiliated entities** — Applicants may participate with affiliated entities (i.e. entities linked to a beneficiary which participate in the action with similar rights and obligations as the beneficiaries, but do not sign the grant and therefore do not become beneficiaries themselves). They will get a part of the grant money and must therefore comply with all the call conditions and be validated (just like beneficiaries); but they do not count towards the minimum eligibility criteria for consortium composition (if any).
- **Associated partners** — Applicants may participate with associated partners (i.e. partner organisations which participate in the action but without the right to get grant money). They participate without funding and therefore do not need to be validated.
- **Consortium agreement** — For practical and legal reasons it is recommended to set up internal arrangements that allow you to deal with exceptional or unforeseen circumstances (in all cases, even if not mandatory under the Grant Agreement). The consortium agreement also gives you the possibility to redistribute the grant money according to your own consortium-internal principles and parameters (for instance, one beneficiary can reattribute its grant money to another beneficiary). The consortium agreement thus allows you to customise the EU grant to the needs inside your consortium and can also help to protect you in case of disputes.

- **Balanced project budget** — Grant applications must ensure a balanced project budget and sufficient other resources to implement the project successfully (*e.g. own contributions, income generated by the action, financial contributions from third parties, etc*). You may be requested to lower your estimated costs, if they are ineligible (including excessive).
- **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).
- **No-profit rule** — Grants may NOT give a profit (i.e. surplus of revenues + EU grant over costs). This will be checked by us at the end of the project.
- **No cumulation of funding/no double funding** — It is strictly prohibited to cumulate 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 be declared under two EU grants. If you would like to nonetheless benefit from different EU funding opportunities, projects must be designed as different actions, clearly delineated and separated for each grant (without overlaps).
- **Combination with EU operating grants** — Combination with EU operating grants is possible, if the project remains outside the operating grant work programme and you make sure that cost items are clearly separated in your accounting and NOT declared twice (see [AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement, art 6.2.E](#)).
- **Multiple proposals** — Applicants (*beneficiaries and affiliated entities – see section 6*) may submit only ONE proposal under the same call (and be awarded a funding). Applicants may NOT participate in several proposals. If they participate or submit several proposals, only one application will be accepted and evaluated; the applicants will be asked to withdraw from the other applications (or they 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 this Call Document (and the documents it refers to). Proposals that do not comply with all the call conditions will be **rejected**. This applies also to applicants: All applicants need to fulfil the criteria; if any one of them doesn't, they must be replaced or the entire proposal will be rejected.
- **Cancellation** — There may be circumstances which may require the cancellation of the call. In this case, you will be informed via a call or topic update. Please note that cancellations are without entitlement to compensation.
- **Language** — You can submit your proposal in any official EU language (project abstract/summary should however always be in English). For reasons of efficiency, we strongly advise you to use English for the entire application. If you need the call documentation in another official EU language, please submit a request within 10 days after call publication (for the contact information, see *section 12*).

- **Transparency** — In accordance with Article 38 of the [EU Financial Regulation](#), information about EU grants awarded is published each year on the [Europa website](#).

This includes:

- beneficiary names
- beneficiary addresses
- the purpose for which the grant was awarded
- the maximum amount awarded.

The publication can exceptionally be waived (on reasoned and duly substantiated request), if there is a risk that the disclosure could jeopardise your rights and freedoms under the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights or harm your commercial interests.

- **Data protection** — The submission of a proposal under this call involves the collection, use and processing of personal data. This data will be processed in accordance with the applicable legal framework. It will be processed solely for the purpose of evaluating your proposal, subsequent management of your grant and, if needed, programme monitoring, evaluation and communication. Details are explained in the [Funding & Tenders Portal Privacy Statement](#).