



Single Market Programme (SMP COSME)

Call for proposals

Boosting Competitiveness and Innovation Capacity of SMEs
through creative partnerships and the use of new technologies

WORTH partnership project

(SMP-COSME-2024-WORTH)

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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

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O. 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 COSME).

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

- Regulation 2024/2509 ([EU Financial Regulation^{1\)}](#)).
- the basic act (SMP Regulation [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 (EISMEA) ('Agency').

The call covers the two following topics:

- **Topic 1- SMP-COSME-2024-WORTH-01 Fashion** (including textiles and clothing, footwear, leather goods, jewellery and fashion accessories).
- **Topic 2- SMP-COSME-2024-WORTH-02 Home decoration** (including furniture, home accessories, interior design and architecture).

Each project application (proposal) under the call must address only one topic. Applicants wishing to apply for more than one topic, must submit a separate proposal under each topic.

Applicants can NOT submit more than one proposal per topic. Organisations may NOT participate in several proposals under the same topic.

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).
 - 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).

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**) ('**EU Financial Regulation**') (OJ L, 2024/2509, 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 Commission Implementing Decision C(2024)5420 of 31 July 2024 amending Commission Implementing Decision C(2023)8926 as regards the implementation of certain actions under the Single Market Programme.

- 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

The Commission Communications from March 2020, "*A new Industrial Strategy for a globally competitive, green and digital Europe*",⁴ and from May 2021, "*Updating the 2020 New Industrial Strategy: Building a stronger Single Market for Europe's recovery*",⁵ set out the way how European industry can lead the transition toward climate neutrality and digital leadership. They build on three key pillars that aim to revitalise and strengthen European industry, support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and ensure that Europe remains sustainable and competitive, namely:

- the green transition, with the European Green Deal driving **Europe's growth** strategy.
- the digital transition, enabling industry and SMEs to enhance their competitiveness.
- competitiveness on the global stage, where Europe must harness the full potential of its single market.

Europe's industry must capitalise on its unique strengths (such as integration across value chains and borders, its diversity, cultural heritage, traditions, and people). To achieve this, it is essential to reinforce industrial ecosystems, which encompass all players operating in a value chain- from small start-ups to the large companies, from academia and research to service providers and suppliers. Among these, cultural and creative industries (CCIs) have been recognised and identified as one of the 14 industrial ecosystems⁶ critical to driving the twin transitions - green and digital - and supporting the recovery of the EU economy. Design and creativity are integral components of the Cultural and Creative Industries' ecosystem, distinguished by their transformative power and potential to drive the twin transition across the economy. Design contributes to greening and innovating products, services and processes, not only within creative industries but also is integral to the value chains of many design-intensive industries. Its cross-cutting application and high relevance for diverse

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_416.

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_1884.

⁶ 2021 Annual Single Market Report p.98 https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2021-05/swd-annual-single-market-report-2021_en.pdf.

sectors, make design a key enabler of competitiveness and growth, with Europe recognised as a world leader in several design related fields.

Design adds significant value to products, services and processes, by enhancing usability, functionality, quality, sustainability and aesthetics. When it comes to the value chain of a product, design plays a pivotal role in determining the eventual environmental impact of a product. It is estimated that over 80% of the environmental impact of a product is determined at the design stage⁷. In addition, digitalisation and advanced technologies are of increasing importance to the design sector. Examples from the industries like fashion demonstrate how technologies such as extended reality (XR) and artificial intelligence (AI) are revolutionising the design process, content creation, consumer experience, and cross-sectoral spill-over and innovation (e.g., crossovers between video-gaming platforms and fashion and live events in virtual worlds).⁸ It is likely that design will play an even greater role in the take-up and integration of advanced technologies across industry.

For the purpose of this call for proposals, design-intensive creative industries entail companies active in lifestyle industries and more specifically: fashion (including textiles and clothing, footwear, leather goods, jewellery and fashion accessories), and home decoration (including furniture, home accessories, interior design and architecture). Most companies in the above-mentioned sectors are SMEs, micro-enterprises, self-employed including craftsmen whose unique skills, techniques and know-how are often not fully leveraged as competitive strengths.

These enterprises face diverse challenges such as: limited access to finance and investment; difficulty keeping pace with digital transformation; limited innovation capacity; difficulty to turn towards more sustainable business models, products and services; incapability to protect their Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) or expand internationally. On one hand, manufacturers, crafters, and tech-providers often struggle to integrate design-thinking and collaborate effectively with designers and creatives. Designers, on the other hand, often lack business related skills or practical knowledge about manufacturing processes, available technology, or innovative materials. Moreover, global competition, particularly from emerging economies, is intensifying. These competitors have not only the advantage of lower production and labour costs but are also developing their own creative content and design capabilities. To foster design skills, sustain the EU manufacturing base, and preserve its knowledge, there is a pressing need for strong cross-sectorial collaboration and innovation amongst creative industries and manufacturing SMEs. Such cross-sectorial collaboration and innovation can be amplified through the creation of partnerships across EU countries, so as to leverage and benefit from the internal market.

With this objective in mind, the European Commission put in place the WORTH Partnership Project, bringing together designers and artisans, crafters, manufacturers, and tech providers across the EU, to create groundbreaking concepts and ideas that embody sustainability and creativity. The WORTH Partnership Project acts as an incubator of transnational partnerships, and to those with higher potential, provides support in the form of, among other, mentorship activities, training sessions or financial aid.

A WORTH Pilot Project was implemented between 2013-2015 in the framework of the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme (CIP), supporting 34 transnational partnerships involving 79 SMEs and creative companies. The WORTH pilot project

⁷ European Commission, Directorate-General for Energy, Directorate-General for Enterprise and Industry, Ecodesign your future – How ecodesign can help the environment by making products smarter, European Commission, 2012, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2769/38512>. As referenced in the EU Commission's A new Circular Economy Action Plan.

⁸ COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT, An EU initiative on Web 4.0 and virtual worlds: a head start in the next technological Transition, COM(2023) 442 final.

aimed at building upon and deploying design and specialised skills and capacities of creative professions while facilitating the integration of design knowledge and competencies in SMEs by combining creativity, design and new technologies. As a result, the initiative contributed to enhancing the competitiveness of European creative companies.

Following the pilot's success, two additional editions of WORTH were implemented under COSME - the EU programme for the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises.

WORTH I (2017-2021) supported 152 partnerships while WORTH II (2021–2025) is currently supporting 202 partnerships. Across both editions, the [WORTH Partnership Project](#) has fostered 354 transnational partnerships involving 815 partners, including SMEs, designers, creative companies and professionals, technology providers, crafters. These partnerships, selected through open calls for expression of interest, span 35 countries associated to the COSME Programme, driving cross-border innovation and collaboration in design and creativity.

During the WORTH's incubation process, the supported partnerships achieved the prototyping stage, developed minimum viable products (MVP), or created final products. Most of the partnerships incubated have found investors, applied for further funding, or extended their collaborations beyond the WORTH programme. Companies participating in the WORTH programme increased their environmental performance by incorporating eco-designed and eco-labelled materials, organically produced material, or material with significant recycled content. Furthermore, several companies enhanced operational efficiency and adopted innovative solutions in their production processes. Designers involved in the WORTH incubation programme gained valuable entrepreneurial skills and benefited from a range of networking and business development opportunities. In addition, the WORTH Partnership Project has established a network of nearly 1800 registered SMEs, designers and partners across Europe through the WORTH gallery. It has also set up a network of WORTH ambassadors in 24 countries. These ambassadors are professionals and institutions committed to promoting the WORTH partnership project across Europe. They contributed to raise awareness on the **project's** different initiatives and calls for expression of interest while actively promoting the core values of creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship.

WORTH Partnership Project is a flagship action for creative industries under the Single Market Programme and its predecessor the COSME Programme. Following the success of the two previous editions, this new call for proposals will ensure the continuation of the action through the implementation of the WORTH III edition (tentative duration: 2025-2028/2029).

This third edition will provide incubation and business support tailored to the following two sectors within the creative and lifestyle industries: 1) fashion (including textiles and clothing, footwear, leather goods, jewellery, fashion accessories) and 2) home decoration (including furniture, home accessories, interior design, and architecture).

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

Objectives

In line with the EU Industrial Strategy⁹, EU SMEs strategy¹⁰ the action will contribute to supporting creative industries and their SMEs. It will contribute to the objectives of

⁹ [European industrial strategy - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#).

¹⁰ [SMEs - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#).

the Single Market Programme and in particular to strengthening the competitiveness and sustainability of enterprises, particularly SMEs, and supporting their access to markets. It will also indirectly contribute to other EU policies such as EU Green Deal¹¹ and New European Bauhaus¹², EU innovation policy¹³, A Europe fit for the digital age¹⁴, EU strategy for sustainable and circular textiles¹⁵ or the Communication on Building the future with nature: Boosting Biotechnology and Biomanufacturing in the EU¹⁶, among others.

The general objective of this call for proposals is to enhance the competitiveness, sustainability, and innovation of European design-intensive creative and lifestyle industries (particularly, in sectors like fashion and home decoration). This will be achieved by reinforcing the sector capacity and fostering transnational cooperation between creative professionals, designers, SMEs and technologies providers. This call for proposals aims to support entrepreneurship and drive the green and digital transitions within the creative and lifestyle industries. It supports transnational business partnerships (**'partnerships'**) between SMEs (e.g. manufacturers, crafters, tech-providers) on the one hand and designers or other creative professionals on the other. Throughout the incubation and acceleration process, these partnerships work to develop innovative, design- and creativity-driven products, processes or services with high value-added helping them either embark on a sustainable business path or enhance their competitive position. Support to selected partnerships in the targeted creative sectors will be provided by the projects selected under this call through: direct financial support to the partnerships, tailor-made mentoring programmes (coaching and strategic advice tailored to meet the specific needs of partnership), general training courses (e.g. marketing, business planning or IPR protection), as well as visibility and networking opportunities for the partnerships. In particular, the mentoring programmes will support partnerships to: i) define and develop their business idea; ii) define their market positioning; iii) showcase their prototypes or proof of concept during relevant trade shows; iv) define their Intellectual Property Rights strategy; v) define their strategy to attract investors and to access markets, including public procurement markets where possible.

More specifically, the WORTH Partnership Project III will promote:

- The integration of creativity, design and advanced technologies (including digital) within SMEs, driving the development of innovative, high-added value products, processes and services.
- The cross-Union cooperation, businesses cross-fertilisation and knowledge sharing between SMEs, designers and other creative professionals.
- The market uptake and commercialisation of innovative business ideas within the creative and lifestyle industries.
- The green and digital solutions' uptake by SMEs operating in the creative industries and beyond.

Themes and priorities (scope)

The WORTH Partnership Project IIIrd edition remains the Europe-wide incubation programme providing direct support to partnerships between SMEs (e.g. manufacturers, crafters, tech-providers) on the one hand and designers or other

¹¹ [The European Green Deal - European Commission \(europa.eu\).](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/en/press-operations/infographic-116876.jpg)

¹² [New European Bauhaus: beautiful, sustainable, together. - European Union \(europa.eu\).](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/en/press-operations/infographic-116876.jpg)

¹³ [The New European Innovation Agenda - European Commission \(europa.eu\).](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/en/press-operations/infographic-116876.jpg)

¹⁴ [A Europe fit for the digital age - European Commission \(europa.eu\).](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/en/press-operations/infographic-116876.jpg)

¹⁵ [Textiles strategy - European Commission.](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/en/press-operations/infographic-116876.jpg)

¹⁶ [Actions to boost biotechnology and biomanufacturing in EU, Bio-based products - European Commission.](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/en/press-operations/infographic-116876.jpg)

creative professionals on the other, during the entire process from idea generation to prototype design as well as product manufacturing and commercialisation, based on tech-driven or green business solutions.

The project proposals shall overall support designers and SMEs in developing innovative products, services and business ideas responding to the most pressing challenges such:

- Circular economy and resources efficiency.
- High-value added solutions for attractive growth markets.
- Advanced digitized manufacturing, value chains and business models.
- Smart, high-performance materials.
- Rethinking social innovation and inclusion.
- Reinvention of craftsmanship and heritage preservation.

Applicants can add additional emerging challenges to the ones mentioned above.

Proposals must take into account the results of projects supported by other EU funding programmes, in particular by previous editions of the WORTH partnership project¹⁷. The complementarities must be described in the project proposals.

The objectives, themes and priorities, activities that can be funded and expected impacts are similar for the entire call, but they target two different sectors: either in the 'fashion' sector, or in the 'home decoration' sector as defined, for the purpose of this call, below.

The scope of this call for proposals is divided into two topics as follows:

- 1) **Fashion** (including textiles and clothing, footwear, leather goods, jewellery, fashion accessories).
- 2) **Home decoration** (including furniture, home accessories, interior design and architecture).

Each project application (proposal) under this call must address only one topic. Applicant consortia wishing to apply for more than one topic, must submit a separate proposal under each topic. Proposals addressing both topics will be rejected.

Applicant consortia cannot submit more than one proposal per topic. Applicant consortia submitting more than one proposal per topic will be asked to choose one proposal and withdraw the others, per topic.

Consortium partners may NOT participate in several proposals per topic.

Topic 1: SMP-COSME-2024-WORTH-01 — Boosting Competitiveness and Innovation Capacity of SMEs through creative partnerships - WORTH partnership project - Fashion

The project proposals submitted under topic 1 will cover support to partnerships in the fashion sector, including textiles and clothing, footwear, leather goods, jewellery, and fashion accessories.

Fashion is one of the most vibrant creative sectors in Europe. It is present in the everyday life of millions of people, and can convey values such as culture, creativity, innovation, and craftsmanship. Europe is home to many independent fashion brands and talented fashion designers. Despite crisis and diverse challenges many European companies in the sector have managed to defend their position in the global market.

¹⁷ https://worth-partnership.ec.europa.eu/index_en.

This is mainly due to a move towards innovative, high added-value products and services, niche markets, and new business models. WORTH partnership projects contribute to innovation and sustainability in the fashion sector, incubating new design-driven solutions and business ideas and promoting transnational cooperation.

The project proposals shall overall support designers and SMEs in developing new innovative products, services, and business ideas in the sector of fashion industries, including textiles and clothing, footwear, leather goods, jewellery, and fashion accessories.

In terms of priorities (scope), the proposal for WORTH Partnership Project – Fashion must:

1. Propose a clear vision and implement robust scheme to support and facilitate the formation of partnerships in the area of fashion. The application must describe how the project intends to first help identify and reach out to potential partners for partnerships (see section on partnerships below), with potential to participate in the WORTH incubation programme. The application must describe how a matchmaking scheme to gather expressions of interest and support formation of partnerships will be set to bring forward the most promising and innovative ideas addressing the challenges set in this call, **in line with WORTH's objectives and the relevant EU policies.**
2. Develop and implement a relevant and robust business support and incubation scheme for supported partnerships. It must include:
 - a) tailor-made mentoring programmes - coaching and strategic advice tailored to meet the specific needs of each of the partnerships.
 - b) general training courses and workshops on e.g. marketing, brand building, business planning, readiness to market, access to markets including public procurement markets where possible, IPR protection, certifications, or financing.
3. Develop a relevant and robust system of financial support to partnerships as detailed in the section on partnerships below (direct financing – third party financial support);
4. Promote creative entrepreneurship and innovation in design-intensive creative and lifestyle industries, through:
 - developing and implementing knowledge sharing and networking activities as well as business links for supported partnerships.
 - organising annual events showcasing the role of creativity and design in innovating entrepreneurship.
 - fostering the emergence of new ideas and collaborations and facilitating the exchange of good practices.
5. Develop communication/promotional actions about the project, its activities and the results achieved by the partnerships.

Topic 2: SMP-COSME-2024-WORTH-02 — Boosting Competitiveness and Innovation Capacity of SMEs through creative partnerships - WORTH partnership project - Home decoration

The project proposals submitted under topic 2 will cover support to partnerships in the Home decoration sector, including furniture, home accessories, interior design and architecture.

Home decoration, interior design and architecture are among the design-intensive industries. They are present in the everyday life of millions of people, and they can convey values such as culture, creativity, innovation, and craftsmanship.

Europe's is home to many design brands and talented designers in this sector. In line with the EU Green Deal objective, the New European Bauhaus and digitalisation shift the sectors related to home decoration, home accessories, interior design and architecture play an important role in the economy and peoples' daily lives innovating on sustainable solutions, innovative materials, waste reduction or use of smart digital technologies. Also WORTH contributes to innovation and sustainability in the home decoration and architecture sector, incubating new design-driven solutions and business ideas as well as promoting transnational cooperation.

The project proposals shall overall support designers and SMEs in developing new innovative products, services, and business ideas in the sector of home decoration industries, including furniture, home accessories, interior design and architecture.

In terms of priorities (scope), the proposals for WORTH Partnership Project – Home decoration must:

1. Propose a clear vision and implement robust scheme to support and facilitate the formation of partnerships in the area of home decoration. The application must describe how the project intends to first help identify and reach out to potential partners for partnerships, (see section on partnerships below), with potential to participate in the WORTH incubation programme. The application must describe how a matchmaking scheme to gather expressions of interest and support formation of partnerships will be set to bring forward the most promising and innovative ideas addressing the challenges set in this **call, in line with WORTH's objectives and the relevant EU policies.**
2. Develop and implement a relevant and robust business support and incubation scheme for supported partnerships. It must include:
 - a. tailor-made mentoring programmes - coaching and strategic advice tailored to meet the specific needs of each of the partnerships.
 - b. general training courses and workshops on e.g. marketing, brand building, business planning, readiness to market, access to markets including public procurement markets where possible, IPR protection, certifications, or financing.
3. Develop a relevant and robust system of financial support to partnerships as detailed in the section on Partnerships below (direct financing – Third party direct financial support).
4. Promote creative entrepreneurship and innovation in design-intensive creative and lifestyle industries, through:
 - developing and implementing knowledge sharing and networking activities as well as business links for supported partnerships.
 - organising annual events showcasing the role of creativity and design in innovating entrepreneurship.

-fostering the emergence of new ideas and collaborations and facilitating the exchange of good practices.

5. Develop communication/promotional actions about the project, its activities and the results achieved by the partnerships.

Activities that can be funded under both topics

Against the afore described priorities (scope), find below a non-exhaustive list of activities that can be funded under both topics. The 5 types of activities listed below are mandatory, and the application must include concrete and detailed activities defined under each of the five types of activities below explaining how they will be implemented. However, the list of implementation activities is not exhaustive. The applicants are welcome to propose additional activities, which may add value to the proposal.

- 1) Activities related to matchmaking/facilitating the establishment of partnerships to be supported:

Development and management of the partnership matchmaking/formation scheme, in particular including:

- Scouting and identification of potential partnership members across the EU and [Participating Countries in the Single Market Programme](#) (SMP).
- Gathering of expressions of interest of potential partners (designers, manufacturers, technology providers, etc.).
- Matchmaking activities, matchmaking camps, etc.
- Launching a dedicated webpage with a tool to help forming the partnerships on **the beneficiary's website**. **NOTA BENE: Please note that costs for a standalone project website are NOT eligible** (see section on Budget categories and cost eligibility rules). **Costs for the matchmaking tool/development of a webpage on the beneficiary's website are eligible.**

- 2) Selection of partnership for Incubation Programme – financial support and business support:

Launch and management of the 'call for financial support to third parties' in line with the guidance provided with this [call](#) and in section on Third Party Financial Support Scheme (FSTP) below, including:

- Validation of partnerships including contractual, legal, and reporting aspects.
- Selection of recipients of the financial support.
- Monitoring and management of the sub-granting scheme.

- 3) Activities related to providing business support for supported partnerships:

Business Support to selected partnerships to help them define and create new, innovative products, services or business models either at the level of a prototype, a limited series (or equivalent), minimum viable product or a final product in particular through:

- Tailor-made capacity building and support activities for the selected business partnerships.

- Individual (tailored per partnership) incubation and mentoring programme supporting partnerships in: i) define and develop their business idea; ii) define their market positioning; iii) showcase their prototypes or proof of concept during relevant trade shows; iv) define their Intellectual Property Rights strategy; v) define their strategy to attract investors and access markets.
- Groups' mentoring programme (spanning from several months to maximum 1 year) per selection, including collaborative workshops, physical and online training courses, webinars and/or other forms of support to SMEs, designers and other final beneficiaries in various areas (e.g. readiness to market, access to markets including public procurement markets where possible, sustainable solutions or materials, certifications, financing, contacts with investors and business partners, business matchmaking, marketing, communication, IPR, brand building etc.).

4) Knowledge Sharing and networking activities, annual events promoting creative entrepreneurship:

Organisation of knowledge sharing and networking activities, as well as annual events promoting creative entrepreneurship, including:

- Organisation of peer learning activities and events to raise awareness and facilitate knowledge sharing on innovative solutions developed.
- Promotion of creative entrepreneurship via different channels.
- Establishing and facilitating cooperation and networking between the partnerships supported, relevant organisations and actors from the sectors involved and **business development's** organisations.
- Implementing cooperation with existing networks of business support organisations at EU, national and regional levels (e.g. Enterprise Europe Network (EEN), clusters).
- Promoting creative entrepreneurship and innovation in design-intensive creative and lifestyle industries through dedicated public events, gathering WORTH participants/beneficiaries and other public (including public local, regional, national authorities) and private stakeholders (including relevant industry associations, chambers of commerce, business support organisations). The purpose is to organise annual events with the aim of showcasing the role of creativity and design in innovating entrepreneurship, fostering the emergence of new ideas and collaborations and facilitating the exchange of good practices.

5) Communication and visibility

Mandatory activities on Communication and visibility are:

- **Webpage on the beneficiaries' site** and use of other necessary digital tools or platforms to **identify and match potential partnerships' members**, manage the calls, organise networking activities, **give visibility to supported partnerships'**, their ideas and success stories.
- Promoting the results achieved by the supported partnerships online and offline - through high-visibility events and established trade shows:
 - o This includes organising at least one (or after each selection cycle) high-visibility physical exhibition to showcase the products or ideas developed by the final beneficiaries, fostering transnational cooperation, and attracting potential investors. Ideally, this event will be held during renowned events or trade shows related to the sector (for instance, one of the European Fashion **Weeks'** events for fashion, or a furniture fair or Design Week for home

decoration in the EU or other eligible country).

- Implement communication activities and publicity of the action to reach the target audience and to promote the values and objectives of the WORTH Partnership Project.
- Exchanging and disseminating existing knowledge, good practices, and project results (e.g. dedicated communication campaign, dissemination/networking events).

As stated above, these lists of implementing activities per type of activities 1) to 5) are not exhaustive, and applicants are welcome to propose additional activities which may add value to the proposal.

Partnerships – target group

Partnerships are the main target group and the ultimate beneficiaries of the WORTH incubation/acceleration programme. Entities forming the partnerships will be the main recipients of the business support and financial support provided by the projects selected under this call for proposals.

The application must reflect the following eligibility requirements for entities forming a partnership, which must be composed of:

1. minimum two and maximum three entities. Entities must be based in one of the eligible countries (as defined in Section 6. Eligibility of this Call for proposals).
2. At least one of the entities must be an [SME \(Small or medium-size enterprise\)](#);
3. One of the entities must be a designer or other creative professional (e.g. an artist) having a role of designer generating the idea.
4. At least two of the following roles must be represented in the partnership:
 - i) designer/creative professional (Mandatory for each eligible partnership).
 - ii) manufacturer/crafter/maker.
 - iii) technology developer/technology supplier/technology owner.
5. Partnerships must address solutions for the eligible creative or lifestyle industry sectors (fashion or home decoration depending on the concept or idea's topic). These solutions can be new innovative products, services, or business models either at the level of a prototype, a limited series (or equivalent), minimum viable product or a final product.
6. Partnerships must be transnational, thus entities forming a partnership must be established in at least two different eligible countries.

The entities involved in the same partnership shall be independent from each other (e.g. no legal, organisational, or financial control link between them).

Normally, each entity shall be involved in one partnership only, unless justified by the concept of the action and agreed with the granting authority.

During the whole duration of the project, the consortium will provide financial support to at least 75 partnerships (third parties), with total amounts between EUR 15.000 and EUR 25.000 per partnership. A minimum of EUR 1.125.000 per topic must be dedicated directly to this third party financial support. However, the consortium is

encouraged to propose a higher number of partnerships to be supported. This will bring added value to the proposal.

The partnerships applying for support may pre-exist or may result from a matchmaking process supported by the selected projects under this call. Partnerships having participated in previous WORTH editions can apply for calls under WORTH III edition only if they propose a new and different concept or idea.

Third Party Financial Support Scheme (FSTP)

Each consortium selected under this call shall put in place a mechanism to provide direct financial support to selected partnerships (third parties).

For the eligibility criteria and other requirements related to partnerships see section above on Partnerships.

The direct financial support shall be tailored to the needs of the partnerships. It shall provide the selected partnerships with a financial incentive or seed capital to develop their innovative products through execution of design idea into prototype, proof of concept or ready for investment or market product.

Applicants must include in their proposal at least the following elements about the direct financial support to partnerships (third parties):

1. a fixed and exhaustive closed list of the different types of activities for which a third party (partnership) may receive direct financial support.
2. the conditions for participation as well as the criteria and modalities for awarding direct financial support.
3. the methodology for calculating the exact amount of the direct financial support, and the payment arrangements.

The persons or categories of persons or entities which may receive financial support must be as defined in the proposal as set out in the above section on Partnerships.

The results to be obtained by the partnerships must be the idea development, proof of concept or prototype building and the showcasing of the results at a relevant event/fair.

Applicants must, already in the proposal, further outline and complete the above lists n° 1 to 3 (types of activities, conditions for participation and methodology for calculating the direct financial support) based on the below general conditions. Lists defined and submitted in the proposal will be considered exhaustive.

1. List of the types of activities for which a third party may receive financial support:

The main activities to be financed must be justified as helping partnerships in the idea development, proof of concept, prototype or final product/service/business models building and the showcasing the results at a relevant event/fair.

For the idea development, proof of concept, prototype, or final product / service / business idea building:

- Definition, finetuning or development of the business idea or design idea.
- Material, services or other inputs purchase necessary to develop proofs of concept and prototypes of new products and services.

- Services and inputs required for developing and testing new business models or techniques, materials, etc.
- Laboratory fees to test more sustainable/recycled/smart material.
- Definition of market positioning.
- Execution/production of the prototype/product/proof of concept or similar.
- Definition and registration of Intellectual Property Rights strategy.
- Definition and implementation of strategy to attract investors.

For the showcasing at a relevant event/fair:

- Showcasing of prototype/proof of concept/or final product/service/business model developed.
- Travel, accommodation and participation fees for study visits and/or participation to networking/showcase events, and/or other travel necessary for developing collaboration within partnerships.

2. Conditions for participation and list of criteria for awarding financial support:

- Feasibility of realisation of the innovative concept or idea submitted by a partnership.
- **Partnership potential, participants' capacity**, competence, and commitment, to be merged with proved expertise/experience of the partners forming a partnership with a professional, company or organisation from another country that brings relevant knowledge/skill/material/technique etc. essential for the realisation of the concept or idea.
- Expected contribution to the overall objectives of the WORTH Partnership Project, relevant EU policies including EU industrial policy with emphasis on fostering innovation, green transition, digital transition, and competitiveness of EU companies.
- Addressing specific objectives and at least one of the challenges identified in the call:
 - o Circular economy and resources efficiency.
 - o High-value added solutions for attractive growth markets.
 - o Advanced digitized manufacturing, value chains and business models.
 - o Smart, high-performance materials.
 - o Rethinking social innovation and inclusion.
 - o Reinvention of craftsmanship and heritage preservation.

Applicants can add additional emerging challenges to the ones mentioned above.

- Demonstrating a promising sustainable business idea/product, service, process/technique development with high potential for innovation within the targeted sector and high market uptake potential.

3. The list of criteria for calculating the exact amount of the financial support / Methodology to set the lump sum(s)

The amount of each lump sum must be between EUR 15,000 and EUR 25,000 per partnership. The applicant must explain the different sets of lump sums

to be given to the partnerships within the above range. In their proposals, and in relation to the financial support to partnerships, applicants MUST:

- Complement the above lists of types of activities for which a third party may receive financial support, and on criteria for awarding financial support;
- Set the criteria for calculating the exact amount of the financial support (lump sum);
- Explain how they will monitor the development and implementation of the ideas by the partnerships that qualify for receiving financial support, bearing in mind that the beneficiaries are the only responsible towards the granting authority.
- Describe how the business and financial support developed will address geographical imbalances across European countries with regard to business innovation, including green and digital transition in the design-intensive lifestyle industries. They must also describe how the actions will reach a broad geographical representation and engage a diverse range of players relevant for the development and fostering of innovative creative business ideas within the targeted sectors.

As financial support to third parties is understood a monetary, financial transaction from the beneficiaries directly to the supported partnerships, costs for non-financial support or support given in-kind (e.g. vouchers for services paid to the service providers different from the partners involved in the collaborative concept or idea) must be declared under other cost categories (e.g. as cost for purchases of vouchers) and must comply with the rules of that cost category.

The financial support cannot be used to reimburse or purchase services provided by the consortia.

If applicable to the specific type of costs and activities, the partners involved in partnerships identify autonomously and freely the service provider(s) from whose services or products they will benefit. If the selected project consortium wants to advise the partnerships on the selection of service providers or products, the list(s) of such providers must be established in a transparent way, with pre-defined criteria. The consortium cannot impose the use of any particular service provider on the partnership.

The selection of the partnerships shall be organised through a 'call for financial support to **third parties**' by the projects selected under this call for proposals. In their proposals, the applicants must explain their selection procedure and criteria, ensuring transparency and equal treatment, in line with the aforementioned exhaustive lists for activities for which a partnership (third party) may receive financial support, criteria for awarding it, and method of calculation of the amount of such financial support.

The assessment and evaluation of the **partnerships'** concept or ideas must be organised in an objective way, respecting equal treatment and transparency, and avoiding conflicts of interest.

Since the financial support to the partnerships is awarded by the projects selected under this call, the '**call for financial support to third parties**', must comply with the '**Guidelines for awarding financial support to third parties**', available at [EISMEA webpage](#), and with the following conditions:

- the calls must be open, published widely across the EU and SMP countries, and conform to standards concerning transparency, equal treatment, conflict of interest and confidentiality.

- the calls must remain open for at least two months.
- the outcome of the **'call for financial support to third parties'** must be published **on the participants' websites, including a description of the selected projects, award dates, project durations, and final recipient legal names and countries.**

Each consortium must monitor closely the partnerships participating in the support scheme, as regards the implementation of their projects, and report regularly on the progress to the granting authority. The consortium must also support the partnership projects to ensure their successful outcome and achievement of the expected results.

The financial support scheme itself is NOT an EU action; the beneficiaries selected under this call for proposals are providing the financial support in their own name and under their own responsibility within the conditions of the project selected under the present call. When promoting the EU action, the financial support must therefore NOT be presented as directly provided by the EU.

Expected impact

The Worth partnership project III will contribute to promote sustainable and circular business solutions in design-driven, lifestyle and creative industries. It will contribute to reduce the impacts of these industries on climate change and environment and preserve biodiversity (through e.g. the promotion of recycled materials or waste for new designed products) and to enhance innovation by use of advanced technologies and digitalisation.

The expected result of this call for proposals is to support one project per topic (one project: WORTH Partnership Project – Fashion and one project: WORTH Partnership Project - Home Decoration). Each project will:

- Support at least 75 partnerships composed in total of at least 150 partners – the ultimate beneficiaries of the action. Support SMEs/designers and others in development of innovative products/services, business models in the fashion and home decoration sectors.
- Provide targeted mentoring and incubation programme for the selected partnerships with the support of relevant experts and business development 's organisations.
- Enable cross-sectoral cooperation and new market opportunities for SMEs, manufacturers, designers and other final beneficiaries.
- Provide visibility to the results developed through high-visibility exhibitions or trade shows and organise events promoting creative entrepreneurship.

Deliverables:

1. Draft and organise one (or several) open **'call for financial support to third parties'** to identify and select the most promising partnerships. If several open **'calls for financial support to third parties'** are organised, **at least the first** must be completed within the first 9 months of the project, and any **subsequent 'calls for financial support to third parties' must be organised in a timeframe which allows a full completion of the activities related to each of those 'calls for financial support to third parties' within the duration of the project.**

2. Detailed report of the (first, if more than one) **'call for financial support to third parties'**, including detailed information about the applicants, evaluation, and selection of partnerships within the first 12 months of the project. If several **open 'calls for financial support to third parties' are organised**, similar detailed reports must be provided for each **'call for financial support to third parties'** within **3 months following the closure of that 'call for financial support to third parties'**.
3. Detailed reports on the support provided to partnerships (mentoring programme, networking / business support / knowledge sharing activities, success stories and visibility). Such reports are to be provided after each selection cycle.
4. Documented developments of new products, services and business ideas - report of the results achieved by the partnerships (this can also include online presentations of the ideas and final products developed, catalogues, videos, etc.).
5. Organisation of high-visibility physical exhibition(s) during the renowned events or trade shows to showcase the products/ideas developed by the final beneficiaries.
6. Organisation of annual events to promote creative entrepreneurship and innovation in design-intensive creative and lifestyle industries.

The forementioned deliverables must be included in the list of deliverables in the proposal. The applicants shall complement the list with all other deliverables to be produced within the action.

Indicators to measure impact:

- Number of partnerships created/ supported.
- Total number of new products, services or other solutions developed and presented at relevant fairs and exhibitions.
- Number of new products, services or other solutions developed that are commercialised or taken up by the market.
- Number of new products, services or other solutions developed related to green transition.
- Number of new products, services or other solutions developed related to digital transition.
- Number of SMEs having benefited from the project.
- Number of participants in the annual events.
- Number of mentoring modules organised.
- Number of EU and SMP countries represented in the supported partnerships.

The applicants must explain the expected impact of the action and demonstrate that they are taking steps to ensure the project results will feed into EU policies as mentioned on the section on Objectives and other relevant policies: regional, environmental, research and innovation, etc.

In the proposal, the applicants shall indicate the set values for the above-mentioned indicators. They may also complement the list of indicators with other relevant parameters for this action.

3. Available budget

The estimated available call budget is EUR 4 500 000.

Specific budget information per topic can be found in the table below:

Topic	Topic budget
Topic 1: SMP-COSME-2024-WORTH-01 Fashion (including textiles and clothing, footwear, leather goods, jewellery, fashion accessories)	EUR 2 250 000
Topic 2: SMP-COSME-2024-WORTH-02 Home decoration (including furniture, home accessories, interior design, and architecture)	EUR 2 250 000

We expect to fund 1 project per topic.

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


4. Timetable and deadlines

Timetable and deadlines (indicative)	
Call opening:	23 January 2025
<u>Deadline for submission:</u>	3 April 2025 – 17:00:00 CET (Brussels)
Evaluation:	April-June 2025
Information on evaluation results:	July 2025
GA signature:	September-October 2025

5. Admissibility and documents

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

Proposals must be submitted electronically via the Funding & Tenders Portal Electronic Submission System (accessible via the Topic page in the [Calls for proposals](#) 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*).
- mandatory annexes and supporting documents (*templates available to be downloaded from the Portal Submission System, completed, assembled and re-uploaded*):
 - detailed budget table (NOTA BENE: applicants must compile and upload only the **'Detailed Budget Table SMP COSME GFS 75 template'**, please disregard the other Detailed Budget table templates.
 - CVs (short outlines) of core project team.
 - list of previous projects (key projects for the last 4 years) (*template available in Part B*).
 - evidence of experience in project management or business support in the field of design, fashion, textiles/ or design, architecture, interior design, furniture and home decoration etc (to be uploaded under **'Other'**).

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 maximum 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

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 (SMP) ([list of participating countries](#))

Legal entities (forming a consortium) may include the following (the list of type of entities is not exhaustive):

- Non-profit organisations (private or public) specialised in business and entrepreneurial support and/or creative industries.
- ‘Public bodies’ specialised in business support for SMEs and/or creative industries.
- Research centres, universities or educational institutions.
- European umbrella organisations of industrial/sectoral associations.
- Business support organisations including business incubators and accelerators, local economic development agencies, entrepreneurial hubs.
- Business development organisations, including business labs, chambers of commerce and industries, trade associations, industry-specific organisations.
- Business Networks and other professional associations.
- Organisations providing specialised communication services (such as communication agencies).
- Providers of sustainable solutions, including recycling centres.
- Profit making entities specialised in business and entrepreneurial support and/or creative industries.
- Financing bodies and/or providers of financing solutions.

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 and definitions

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 persons¹⁸.

¹⁸ See Article 200(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation 2024/2509.

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'**¹⁹. ⚠ 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)*²⁰). 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).

EU conditionality measures — Special rules apply for entities subject to measures adopted on the basis of EU Regulation 2020/2092²¹. Such entities are not eligible to participate in any funded role (beneficiaries, affiliated entities, subcontractors, recipients of financial support to third parties, etc). Currently such measures are in place for Hungarian public interest trusts established under the Hungarian Act IX of 2021 or any entity they maintain (see [Council Implementing Decision \(EU\) 2022/2506](#), as of 16 December 2022).

 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 three [3] applicants (beneficiaries; not affiliated entities), which complies with the following conditions:

- minimum three [3] and a maximum of eight [8] independent entities from minimum three [3] different eligible countries
- From the entities above:
 - a) at least one (1) business support organisation²² or legal entity with proven capacity of knowledge transfer to, and training of SMEs, such as university, training centre or research centre;
 - b) at least one (1) legal entity specialized in communication and dissemination.

¹⁹ For the definitions, see Articles 190(2) and 200(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation 2024/2509.

²⁰ 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](#).

²¹ Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2020/2092 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2020 on a general regime of conditionality for the protection of the Union budget (OJ L 325, 20.12.2022, p. 94).

²² Within the scope of this call for proposals a *business support organisation* refers to a business incubator or accelerator, start-up, lab, innovation hub, university or educational institution, research centre and any other relevant organisation with a proven capacity and experience in running business support activities focused on SMEs.

Eligible activities

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 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*). Projects must also respect EU values and European Commission policy regarding reputational matters (*e.g. activities involving capacity building, policy support, awareness raising, communication, dissemination, etc*).

Financial support to third parties is allowed for grants or similar forms of support under the conditions set out in section 2.

Financial support to third parties will be accepted to support partnership concepts or ideas.

Your project application must clearly specify why financial support to third parties is needed, how it will be managed and provide a list of the different types of activities for which a third party may receive financial support. The proposal must also clearly describe the results to be obtained.

Geographic location (target countries)

Proposals must relate to activities taking place in the eligible countries.

Duration

Projects should normally range between 36 and 48 months.

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

Project budget

Project budgets (requested grant amount) are expected to be EUR 2.250.000 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).

Consortium must demonstrate the relevant experience with the topic theme chosen, by providing the evidence of experience in project management or business support in the field of design, fashion, textiles for topic 1) or design, architecture, interior design, furniture, home decoration for topic 2).

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:

- profiles (qualifications and experience as per submitted CVs) of the staff responsible for managing and implementing the project;
- description of the consortium participants;
- list of previous projects (key projects for the last 4 years; *template available in Part B*);
- demonstrate the relevant experience of the consortium with the topic theme

chosen via the above or additional documents including evidence of experience in project management or business support in the field of design, fashion, textiles or design, architecture, interior design, furniture and home decoration **(to be uploaded under 'Other')**.

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 participate²³:

- 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 misconduct²⁴ (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 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).
- intentionally and without proper justification resisted²⁵ an investigation, check or audit carried out by an EU authorising officer (or their representative or auditor), OLAF, the EPPO, or the European Court of Auditors.

Applicants will also be rejected if it turns out that²⁶:

²³ See Articles 138 and 143 of EU Financial Regulation 2024/2509.

²⁴ 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.

²⁵ **'Resisting an investigation, check or audit'** means carrying out actions with the goal or effect of preventing, hindering or delaying the conduct of any of the activities needed to perform the investigation, check or audit, such as refusing to grant the necessary access to its premises or any other areas used for business purposes, concealing or refusing to disclose information or providing false information.

- 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 (for each topic) 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.
- 3) After that, the remainder of the available call budget will be used to fund projects across the different topics in order to ensure a balanced spread of the geographical and thematic coverage and while respecting to the maximum possible extent the order of merit based on the evaluation of the award criteria.

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.*

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

²⁶ See Article 143 EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

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 project, 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/trans-national dimension; impact/interest for a number of countries (EU or eligible non-EU countries); possibility to use the results in other countries; potential to develop mutual trust/cross-border cooperation (30 points)
2. **Quality:**
 - **Project design and implementation:** technical quality; logical links between the identified problems, needs and solutions proposed (logical frame concept); methodology for implementing the project (concept and methodology, management, procedures, timetable, risks and risk management, monitoring and evaluation); feasibility of the project within the proposed time frame; cost effectiveness (sufficient/appropriate budget for proper implementation; best value for money) (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, ability to network with other business support organisations and their networks (e.g. the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN), the Clusters Collaboration Framework, investors networks and others (30 points)
3. **Impact:** ambition and expected long-term impact of results on target groups (designers, SMEs) and their ability to participate and drive the twin transition and other major challenges through innovation and design-driven solutions; 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*.

Activities should start in September/October 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.

See compulsory deliverables mentioned in section 2 above.

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 (requested 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 rates fixed in the Grant Agreement (100% for the costs for providing financial support to third parties and 75% for all other cost categories).

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
 - D.1 Financial support to third parties
- E. Indirect costs

Specific cost eligibility conditions for this call:

- personnel costs:
 - SME owner/natural person unit cost²⁷: Yes
- travel and subsistence unit cost²⁸: Yes²⁹
- equipment costs: depreciation
- other cost categories:
 - costs for financial support to third parties: allowed for grants or similar. Minimum amount per '**transnational business partnership**' (third party) EUR 15.000 and maximum EUR 25.000³⁰; At least 50% of the requested grant amount must be devoted to third parties direct financial support
 - 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)

²⁷ 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).

²⁸ 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).

²⁹ See [EU Grants AGA – Annotated Grant Agreement](#), art 6 on eligible costs: travel and subsistence costs must be declared using the unit cost according to Annex 2a of the grant agreement. If a particular instance of travel, accommodation or subsistence in the action is not covered by one of the unit costs mentioned in Decision C(2021)35 the actual costs may be used.

³⁰ Exceptionally a higher amount could be requested because the objective of the action would otherwise be impossible or overly difficult to achieve and this is duly justified in the Application Form and accepted by the granting authority (within the limit of EUR 60.000 per entity composing the partnership (Art 207 FR)).

- 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.

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 70% 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 interim payments (with detailed cost reporting).

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.

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 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
- 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

Consortium agreement: Yes.

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 EULogin 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 file (single or multiple depending on the slots). Excel upload is sometimes possible, depending on the file type.

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 at the latest 3 working days before the call submission deadline to the following email address: 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). If affiliated entities participate in your project, please do not forget to provide documents demonstrating their affiliation link to your organisation as part of your application.
- 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** — Each project application (proposal) under this call must address only one topic. Applicant consortia wishing to apply for more than one topic, must submit a separate proposal under each topic. Proposals addressing both topics will be rejected. Applicant consortia cannot submit more than one proposal per topic. Applicant consortia submitting more than one proposal per topic will be asked to choose one proposal and withdraw the others, per topic. Consortium partners may NOT participate in several proposals under the same topic.
- **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](#).