



Pilot Projects and Preparatory Actions (PPPA)

Call for proposals

Net-Zero AI4Permitting

(PPPA-2026-NETZERO)

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CALL FOR PROPOSAL

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0. Introduction

This is a call for proposals for EU action grants in the field of acceleration of industrial permitting.

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

- Regulation 2024/2509 ([EU Financial Regulation](#)) ⁽¹⁾.

The call is launched in accordance with the applicable Financing Decisions ⁽²⁾ and will be managed by the European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency (EISMEA) (**'Agency'**).

The call covers the following topic:

- **PPPA-2026-NETZERO-01 - Net-Zero AI4Permitting**

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)

⁽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⁾ Commission Decision C(2025) 811 final of 12.2.2025 concerning the financing of certain pilot projects **and preparatory actions relating to the 'Single Market'** and on the adoption of the work programme for 2025.

Commission Decision C(2026) 407 final of 28.01.2026 on the financing of a pilot project relating to the **'Single Market'** and on the adoption of the work programme for 2026.

- evaluation and award procedure (section 8)
- award criteria (section 9)
- legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements (section 10)
- how to submit an application (section 11)
- the Online Manual outlines the:
 - procedures to register and submit proposals online via the EU Funding & Tenders Portal (**'Portal'**)
 - recommendations for the preparation of the application
- the AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement contains:
 - detailed annotations on all the provisions in the Grant Agreement you will have to sign in order to obtain the grant (including cost eligibility, payment schedule, accessory obligations, etc.).

1. Background

The Net-Zero Industry Act (NZIA) aims to enhance European manufacturing capacity for net-zero technologies, addressing barriers to scaling up production in Europe. The Regulation will increase the competitiveness of the net-zero technology sector, attract investments, and improve market access for clean tech in the EU.

NZIA introduced the concept of Net-Zero Acceleration Valleys. These are industry clusters which aim to attract investment in net-zero technology manufacturing projects at regional and local levels. EU countries are responsible for designating valleys and preparing plans that set out concrete national measures to support net-zero technology manufacturing and simplify administrative procedures.

Bottlenecks in existing permitting processes, such as lack of interoperability, outdated infrastructure, and administrative inefficiencies, have been highlighted as barriers which can be alleviated through targeted digital solutions.

The call for proposals targets local, regional, and national authorities involved in industrial permitting procedures. These procedures typically encompass a range of permits necessary for ensuring compliance with environmental, safety, and operational standards. Examples include Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) for projects with potential environmental effects, Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC) permits for pollution management, renewable energy permits and various construction and operational permits.

The call for proposals will support local authorities located in Net-Zero Acceleration Valleys as outlined in NZIA ⁽³⁾. Projects must be designed for scalability, allowing its application to other industrial cluster initiatives, Coal Regions in transition and **strategically significant industrial projects, as part of the EU's broader efforts to digitalise and accelerate permitting processes.**

⁽³⁾ [Net-Zero Industry Act - European Commission](#)

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

Objectives

The objective of the Net-Zero AI4Permitting call for proposals is to strengthen the administrative capacity of permitting authorities in Net-Zero Acceleration Valleys by deploying digital and AI enabled solutions that reduce processing time, improve transparency and optimise the use of staff resources.

A further objective is to improve interoperability across digital infrastructure, ensuring smooth integration and cohesion between existing systems at both local, regional and - where possible - national levels.

Additionally, the call for proposal seeks to ensure that all permitting processes comply robustly with EU and national legislative frameworks, enhancing regulatory adherence and minimizing legal barriers.

By incorporating state-of-the-art digital and AI technologies, the call for proposals will contribute to automating routine tasks, reducing the burden on permitting authorities and allowing them to focus on more strategic decision-making. It will also contribute to improving transparency, enabling easier tracking of processes, deadlines and follow-up actions and making permitting more user friendly both for applicants and authorities.

Cross-border cooperation will be facilitated to share best practices and successful models, promoting replication and scalability of effective solutions in other regions.

Projects are invited to prioritise designs that enable replication across regions and Member States and/or reuse beyond net-zero permitting, including through modular architectures, documented interfaces, and implementation playbooks.

Through focused consultation with project developers, the projects need to capture insights and feedback, ensuring that solutions are tailored to meet actual user needs, particularly in front office systems, making them user-centric and efficient.

Collectively, these objectives are set to position Net-Zero Acceleration Valleys as leaders in digital permitting innovation, driving the transition towards sustainable industrial practices. In doing so, they should serve as showcase examples that can be scaled and replicated across similar permitting processes, including Coal Regions in Transition, other industrial cluster initiatives or industrial projects of strategic relevance, while generating positive spillover effects on other regions and countries.

Themes and priorities (scope)

Proposals must target the following priorities:

- Acceleration and streamlining of permitting processes: Enhance efficiencies in permitting systems to reduce processing times and resource expenditures.
- Digital infrastructure interoperability: Facilitate seamless integration between local, national, and EU systems to ensure unified operations and data sharing.
- Compliance with EU and national legislation: Align permitting processes with existing legislative frameworks (in particular the Net-Zero Industry Act) to ensure legal adherence and reduce regulatory barriers, and to ensure the required level of protection and security of the information and data processed.
- Cross-regional and cross-border replication and reusability: Prioritise solutions that can be adopted by multiple permitting authorities across regions and

Member States and reused for other permitting themes beyond net-zero, supported by a credible replication plan and evidence of interest from additional adopters.

- Alignment with ongoing digitalization initiatives: Coordinate efforts with existing projects focused on digitalization in Member States governments and authorities to create synergies and prevent duplication, optimizing resources.
- Consultation and feedback collection: Engage stakeholders actively in the system development process, incorporating feedback to ensure solutions are functional and effective.
- Deployment and training to upskill staff: Provide comprehensive training programmes and resources to upskill the staff of permitting authorities, ensuring they are adept in utilizing new systems and technologies effectively.

Activities that can be funded (scope)

The possible types of activities which can be undertaken by the projects are the following (non-exhaustive list):

- Conducting a system analysis: Performing comprehensive assessments to identify inefficiencies and delays within current permitting processes. Analysing the process workflow and competence distribution, to identify possible bottlenecks and workflow elements that can be assisted by AI solutions to speed up the process. This analysis shall help design targeted solutions that align with EU and national legislative requirements.
- Procurement and/or deployment of digital/AI-based solutions: Acquiring and integrating AI-driven platforms to automate routine tasks and enhance decision-making capabilities. These solutions shall streamline workflows and reduce the manual burden on permitting authorities.
- Enhancement of existing IT solutions: Upgrading current IT infrastructure to incorporate advanced digital/AI features that improve interoperability and system performance. Enhancements shall ensure seamless data exchange and compatibility with other integrated systems.
- Development of user-centric front office systems: Designing intuitive and accessible user interfaces for applicants based on feedback from project developers and end-users. By prioritizing user experience, these systems must facilitate smoother interactions and improve overall satisfaction.
- Comprehensive staff training programmes: Developing and delivering training sessions to upskill the staff of permitting authorities in utilizing new technologies effectively. These must ensure that personnel are equipped with the necessary skills to adopt and leverage the newly deployed or upgraded systems.
- Collaboration with ongoing digitalization initiatives: Engaging with existing projects focused on digitalization to leverage synergies and share resources. This collaboration must aim to prevent duplication of efforts and optimize impactful integration.
- Consultations for feedback and system improvement: Organizing regular consultation sessions with stakeholders, including project developers, to gather valuable insights into system needs and improvements. Feedback from these sessions shall inform iterative enhancements to align solutions with practical demands.

- Cooperation activities between authorities: Fostering partnerships among local, regional, and national permitting authorities including cross-border activities to ensure coordinated efforts and policy coherence. These activities must support unified approaches and peer learning across different jurisdictions.
- Packaging outputs for replication and reuse: Producing reusable assets such as reference architectures, interface specifications, data dictionaries/mappings, procurement-ready requirement lists, training curricula, and an adoption playbook that enable transfer to additional authorities (including in other Member States) and, where relevant, to other permitting domains.
- Engagement with Project Developers and IT/AI Solution Providers: Establishing strong cooperation frameworks that include project developers and tech providers to integrate cutting-edge solutions. This collaboration shall ensure that technologies developed are aligned with real-world needs and scalable across different platforms.

Expected impact

The projects are expected to deliver transformative impacts on the permitting process in the selected Net-Zero Acceleration Valleys. A key impact will be the substantial reduction in time and resource consumption, leading to faster processing and more efficient allocation of resources through streamlined procedures and automated digital platforms.

Enhanced interoperability and data-sharing across systems must facilitate seamless communication and collaboration among various agencies, improving decision-making and service delivery. This shall result in a more cohesive network of information exchange, reducing redundancies and increasing transparency in the permitting process.

Cross-border sharing of experiences must help the implementation of effective solutions on a broader scale, fostering international collaboration and the potential adoption of best practices across different jurisdictions.

A core expected impact is measurable replication of readiness and uptake beyond the pilot site(s), demonstrated through:

- commitments or letters of intent from additional permitting authorities (cross-regional and/or cross-border),
- concrete adoption pathways (governance, resourcing, and timeline), and
- reusable artefacts that materially reduce the effort for other authorities to adopt the solution.

Finally, by incorporating user feedback, the projects must ensure that permitting systems are designed with the end-user in mind, resulting in solutions that cater to the specific needs of project developers.

Collectively, these impacts shall result in more efficient, and user-friendly permitting processes, enhancing collaboration, innovation, and service delivery across jurisdictions, while fostering a forward-thinking approach to regulatory management.

Applicants must identify their projects' KPIs to achieve expected impact. KPIs should be realistic and achievable and must be listed in the proposals.

Definitions for evaluation purposes

Cross-regional impact means demonstrable expected uptake and/or benefits across

multiple regions or multiple permitting authorities within a Member State, beyond the single locality implementing the pilot.

Cross-border impact means demonstrable expected uptake and/or benefits across at least two Member States, beyond the immediate consortium partners.

Reusability means that outputs (e.g., components, specifications, data models, templates, training materials, governance approaches) are designed so they can be adopted with limited adaptation:

- by other permitting authorities,
- in other Member States, and/or
- for permitting processes beyond net-zero (e.g., other industrial projects of strategic relevance).

3. Available budget

The estimated available call budget is EUR 7 150 000.

We expect to fund up to four projects under this call for proposals.

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

4. Timetable and deadlines

Timetable and deadlines (indicative)	
Call opening:	1 April 2026
<u>Deadline for submission:</u>	<u>3 June 2026 – 17:00:00 CET</u> <u>(Brussels)</u>
Evaluation:	June - September 2026
Information on evaluation results:	September 2026
GA signature:	December 2026

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 (*template to be downloaded from the Portal Submission System, completed, assembled and re-uploaded*)
- mandatory annexes and supporting documents (*templates to be downloaded from the Portal Submission System, completed, assembled and re-uploaded*):
 - detailed budget table/calculator
 - CVs of core project team: not applicable
 - activity reports of last year: not applicable
 - list of previous projects (key projects for the last 4 years) (*template available in Part B*)
 - an endorsement letter from the relevant authority who designates the Net-Zero Acceleration Valley. The letter must recognise all the authorities included as applicants in the Consortia as the permitting authorities being involved in industrial permitting procedures in designated Net-Zero Acceleration Valleys and/or in potential Net-Zero Acceleration Valleys.

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 all 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 (please check carefully the layout of the documents uploaded).

Proposals are limited to maximum 70 pages (Part B). Evaluators will not consider any additional pages. Shorter proposals are welcome.

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), and
- be established in one of the eligible countries, i.e.:

- EU Member States (including overseas countries and territories (OCTs)), and
- be involved in industrial permitting procedures in designated Net-Zero Acceleration Valleys and/or in potential Net-Zero Acceleration Valleys ⁽⁴⁾, and supported by an endorsement letter from a national authority designating the Net-Zero Acceleration Valley. This applies to local, regional and national permitting authorities.

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 NOT eligible.

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 persons ⁽⁵⁾.

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

Associations and interest groupings — Entities composed of members may participate **as 'sole beneficiaries' or 'beneficiaries without legal personality'** ⁽⁶⁾.  Please note that if the 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).

EU restrictive measures — Special rules apply for 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) ⁽⁷⁾. 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).

⁽⁴⁾ Net-Zero Acceleration Valleys (NZAVs) are designated by national authorities. Many of the potential NZAVs are being identified and the official designation process is ongoing in 2026.

⁽⁵⁾ See Article 200(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

⁽⁶⁾ For the definitions, see Articles 190(2) and 200(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

⁽⁷⁾ Please note that the EU Official Journal contains the official list and, in case of conflict, its content prevails over that of the [EU Sanctions Map](#).

EU conditionality measures — Special rules apply for entities subject to measures adopted on the basis of EU Regulation 2020/2092 ⁽⁸⁾. 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 four applicants (beneficiaries; not affiliated entities), which complies with the following conditions:

- minimum four independent entities from two different Member States
- at least two public authorities from the already established and/or potential Net-Zero Acceleration Valley, recognised via the endorsement letter
- the Coordinator of each Consortium must be one of the public authorities described in the above bullet point.

Non-concurrent submission and non-concurrent participation

Applicants may not submit more than one proposal for different projects under this call for proposals (and be awarded a funding for them). Entities may participate only in one proposal under this call for proposals. If the same entity participates in more than one proposal, all concerned proposals will be considered ineligible under this call.

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.) ⁽⁹⁾.

Financial support to third parties is not allowed.

⁽⁸⁾ 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).

⁽⁹⁾ See, for instance, Guidance on funding for activities related to the development, implementation, monitoring and enforcement of Union legislation and policy.

Geographic location (target countries)

Proposals must relate to activities taking place in eligible countries (*see above*), with particular focus on designated and potential Net-Zero Acceleration Valleys, in particular in EU coal regions in transition ⁽¹⁰⁾.

Duration

Projects should normally range between 24 and 30 months.

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

Project budget

Project budgets (requested grant amount) are expected to range between EUR 1 500 000 and EUR 2 400 000 per project.

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 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

⁽¹⁰⁾ [EU coal regions in transition - European Commission](#)

- 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).

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:

- general profiles (qualifications and experiences) 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*).

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 participate ⁽¹⁾:

- 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 misconduct ⁽²⁾ (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

⁽¹⁾ See Articles 138 and 143 of EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

⁽²⁾ 'Professional misconduct' includes, in particular, the following: violation of ethical standards of the profession; wrongful conduct with impact on professional credibility; breach of generally accepted professional ethical standards; false declarations/misrepresentation of information; participation in a cartel or other agreement distorting competition; violation of IPR; attempting to influence decision-making processes by taking advantage, through misrepresentation, of a conflict of interests, or to obtain confidential information from public authorities to gain an advantage; incitement to discrimination, hatred or violence or similar activities contrary to the EU values where negatively affecting or risking to affect the performance of a legal commitment.

- 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 resisted ⁽¹³⁾ 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 that ⁽¹⁴⁾:

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

8. Evaluation and award procedure

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

An evaluation committee (assisted by independent outside experts) will assess all applications. Proposals will first be checked for formal requirements (admissibility, and eligibility, *see sections 5 and 6*). Proposals found admissible and eligible will be evaluated against the operational capacity and award criteria (*see sections 7 and 9*) and then ranked according to their scores.

For proposals with the same score 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 will be prioritised according to the scores they have been awarded for the award criterion '**Impact**'. When these scores are equal, priority will be based on their scores for the criterion 'Quality'. When these

⁽¹³⁾ '**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.

⁽¹⁴⁾ See Article 143 EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

scores are equal, priority will be based on their scores for the criterion 'Relevance'.

- 2) If this does not allow to determine the priority, a further prioritisation can be done by considering 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 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. Full compliance will be a pre-condition for signing the grant.

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

9. Award criteria

The award criteria for this call are as follows:

1. Relevance (35 points):

- Clarity and consistency of the project
- Objectives and extent to which they match the themes and priorities and objectives of the call
- Contribution to the EU strategic and legislative context
- EU added value and European/trans-national dimension, including the extent to which the proposal:
 - targets cross-regional and/or cross-border needs,
 - aligns with interoperability approaches that facilitate adoption across Member States, and
 - is designed for reuse beyond net-zero (where relevant) with clear transfer assumptions.

2. Quality (35 points):

- Logical links between the identified problems, needs and solutions proposed

(logical frame concept)

- Quality of the consortium and project teams **to deliver on the project's** objectives; extent to which the role and contribution of each partner is appropriate and in line with its experience and past activities with a view of reaching the main objective and its supporting ones; appropriate procedures and problem-solving mechanisms for cooperating within the project teams and consortium
- Appropriate procedures and problem-solving mechanisms for cooperating within the project teams and consortium
- Methodology for implementing the project (concept and methodology, organisation of the work (procedures and allocation of resources), project management, work plan, involvement of subcontractors, timetable, risks and risk management, quality assurance, monitoring and evaluation)
- Feasibility of the project within the proposed time frame
- Cost effectiveness (sufficient/appropriate budget for proper implementation; best value for money)

3. Impact (30 points):

- Expected measurable benefits for permitting authorities and applicants (time, transparency, workload), and contribution to faster permitting in Net-Zero Acceleration Valleys
- Expected cross-regional and/or cross-border uptake after the project ends, including credibility of adoption pathways beyond the pilot(s)
- Reusability and transferability of outputs across Member States and/or across permitting themes beyond net-zero (where relevant), including the completeness of reusable artefacts (e.g., specifications, playbooks, training materials)
- Appropriate, objectively verifiable and achievable indicators to measure project outcomes and expected impact
- Dissemination strategy ensuring visibility and uptake
- Sustainability of results after EU funding ends.

Award criteria	Minimum pass score	Maximum score
Relevance	22	35
Quality	22	35
Impact	19	30
Overall (pass) scores	63	100

Maximum points: 100 points.

Individual thresholds per criterion: 22/35, 22/35 and 19/30 points.

Overall threshold: 63 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*.

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.

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 rate fixed in the Grant Agreement (80%).

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
- A.5 Volunteers
- B. Subcontracting costs
- C. Purchase costs
 - C.1 Travel and subsistence
 - C.2 Equipment
 - C.3 Other goods, works and services
- E. Indirect costs

Specific cost eligibility conditions for this call:

- personnel costs:
 - SME owner/natural person unit cost ⁽¹⁵⁾: Yes
- travel and subsistence unit cost ⁽¹⁶⁾: Yes ⁽¹⁷⁾
- equipment costs: depreciation
- other cost categories:
 - costs for financial support to third parties: not allowed
- indirect cost flat-rate: 7% of the eligible direct costs (categories A-D, except volunteers costs and exempted specific cost categories, if any)
- VAT: non-deductible/non-refundable VAT is eligible (but please note that since 2013 VAT paid by beneficiaries that are public bodies acting as public authority is NOT eligible)
- other:
 - in-kind contributions for free are allowed, but cost-neutral, i.e. they cannot be declared as cost
 - kick-off meeting: costs for kick-off meeting organised by the granting authority are eligible (travel costs for maximum 2 persons, return ticket to Brussels and accommodation for one night) only if the meeting takes place after the project starting date set out in the Grant Agreement; the starting date can be changed through an amendment, if needed
 - project websites: communication costs for presenting the project on the participants' **websites or social media accounts** are eligible; costs for *separate* project websites are not eligible
 - potential purchase of digital/AI-based solutions must be budgeted under '**C.2 Equipment**'

⁽¹⁵⁾ 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).

⁽¹⁶⁾ 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).

⁽¹⁷⁾ 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.

- 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 no interim payments.

In addition, you will be expected to submit one progress report not linked to payments.

Payment of the balance: At the end of the project, we will calculate your final grant amount. If the total of earlier payments is higher than the final grant amount, we will ask you (your coordinator) to pay back the difference (recovery).

All payments will be made to the coordinator.

 Please be aware that payments will be automatically lowered if you or 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)*:

- rights of use on results: Yes

Communication, dissemination and visibility of funding: *see Model Grant Agreement (art 17 and Annex 5)*:

- additional communication and dissemination activities: Yes

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

- durability: 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 [Calls for proposals](#) 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 may 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 5 working days before the call submission deadline to the following email address: EISMEA-SMP-NET-ZERO-AI4-PERMITTING@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; 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; projects must be designed as different actions, clearly delineated and separated for each grant (without overlaps).
- **Combination with EU operating grants** — Combination with EU operating grants is possible, if the project remains outside the operating grant work programme and you make sure that cost items are clearly separated in your accounting and NOT declared twice (see [AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement, art 6.2.E](#)).
- **Multiple proposals** — Applicants may not submit more than one proposal for different projects under this call for proposals (and be awarded a funding for them). Entities may participate only in one proposal under this call for proposals. If the same entity participates in more than one proposal, all concerned proposals will be considered ineligible under this call.
- **Resubmission** — Proposals may be changed and re-submitted until the deadline for submission.
- **Rejection** — By submitting the application, all applicants accept the call conditions set out in this Call document (and the documents it refers to). Proposals that do not comply with all the call conditions will be rejected. This applies also to applicants: All applicants need **to fulfil the criteria; if any one of them doesn't, they must be replaced or the entire proposal will be rejected.**
- **Cancellation** — There may be circumstances which may require the cancellation of the call. In this case, you will be informed via a call or topic update. Please note that cancellations are without entitlement to compensation.
- **Language** — You can submit your proposal in any official EU language (project abstract/summary should however always be in English). For reasons of efficiency, we strongly advise you to use English for the entire application. If you need the call documentation in another official EU language, please submit a request within 10 days after call publication (for the contact information, see *section 12*).

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

This includes:

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

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

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