



Digital Europe Programme (DIGITAL)

Call for proposals

Advanced Digital Skills
(DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05)

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EUROPEAN HEALTH AND DIGITAL EXECUTIVE AGENCY (HaDEA)

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CALL FOR PROPOSALS

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0. Introduction

This is a call for proposals for EU **action grants** in the field of advanced digital skills under the **Digital Europe Programme (DIGITAL)**.

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

- Regulation 2018/1046 ([EU Financial Regulation](#))
- The basic act (Digital Europe Regulation 2021/694¹).

The call is launched in accordance with the 2023/2024 Work Programme² and will be managed by the **European Health and Digital Executive Agency (HaDEA)** ('Agency').

The call covers the following **topics**:

- **DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05-SPECIALEDU - Specialised Education Programmes in Key Capacity Areas**
- **DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05-CYBERACADEMY - Cybersecurity Skills Academy**
- **DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05-SPECIAL-PROGEDU - Specialised Education Programmes in Key Capacity Areas - Advanced digital skills analysis**

We invite you to read the **call documentation** on the Funding & Tenders Portal Topic page 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 and activities that can be funded as well as the expected results (sections 1 and 2)
 - timetable and available budget (sections 3 and 4)
 - admissibility and eligibility conditions (including mandatory documents; sections 5 and 6)
 - criteria for financial and operational capacity and exclusion (section 7)
 - evaluation and award procedure (section 8)
 - award criteria (section 9)
 - legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements (section 10)
 - how to submit an application (section 11)
- the [Online Manual](#) outlines the:

¹ Regulation (EU) 2021/694 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2021 establishing the Digital Europe Programme (OJ L 166, 11.05.2021).

² Commission Implementing Decision C/2023/1862 of 24.03.2023 concerning the adoption of the multiannual work programme for 2023 - 2024 and the financing decision for the implementation of the Digital Europe Programme.

- 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 Digital Skills and Jobs Platform³ to consult the list of projects funded previously.

1. Background

As set out in the Digital Decade Communication, the European way to a digitalised economy and society is anchored in the empowerment of its citizens and businesses, ensuring the security and resilience of its digital supply chains.

In the context of global competition for brains, there is a particular need to recruit more **ICT specialists** in Europe to fulfil the needs of industrial ecosystems relying heavily on **cutting edge-technologies**. Furthermore, innovations and breakthroughs in different digital areas will further unleash a wave of increased demand in the area of **advanced digital skills**. In addition to the significant shortage of ICT specialists, there is also a high need to equip **sector specialists** (e.g. in health, agriculture, etc.) **with advanced digital skills**.

Therefore, only with increased efforts can the EU's ambitious Digital Decade targets of the recently adopted **Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030**⁴ be achieved, including the target that 20 million **ICT experts** will be employed in the EU by 2030, with more **ICT graduates** and a better **gender balance**.

One topic of this call aims at supporting the **excellence of EU higher education** to build up **specialised education programmes** and self-standing modules in the area of advanced digital skills. The goal of this call is therefore to improve the capacity to nurture and attract digital talents, while fostering an educational ecosystem that will help drive innovation and digital breakthroughs.

As another topic included in this call, **cybersecurity** has become a growing concern for European citizens, businesses and public authorities. There is a need to strengthen preparedness of the key sectors and response action across the EU to cyberthreats. The available actions and resources in cybersecurity, including training and specialised education, are perceived as scattered and inaccessible. The Cybersecurity Skills Academy, an initiative that the European Commission presented in spring 2023 as part of a broader package of the EU cybersecurity policy, will constitute a hub integrating and complementing many efforts and resources on cybersecurity skills.

A third topic included in this call entails a coordination and support action, which aims at providing an analysis of **advanced digital skills needs**, will recommend priority areas for upcoming funding programmes in the area of advanced digital skills and will provide best practice examples for designing and implementing education programmes and training in this area. This topic will further support networking opportunities among the different consortia awarded from the different call topics of

³ <https://digital-skills-jobs.europa.eu/en>

⁴ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec/2022/2481/oj>

the Digital Europe Programme – Strategic Objective 4 (Advanced Digital Skills), building a brand of excellence.

2. Objectives – Scope – Outcomes and deliverables – KPIs to measure outcomes and deliverables – Targeted stakeholders – Type of action – specific topic conditions

DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05-SPECIALISED-EDU - Specialised Education Programmes in Key Capacity Areas

Objectives

The objective of this call topic is to support excellence in higher education institutions, making them world leaders in training the digital specialists of the future and to increase the capacity of the educational offer in the area of advanced digital skills. This should lead to the development of dynamic digital educational ecosystems where higher education institutions as well as innovative partners from industry and research work together to attract and retain the best talents worldwide.

Actions⁵ funded under this topic will contribute to the target of 20 million ICT specialists in the EU by 2030, as set in the Digital Decade Policy Programme. These actions will also contribute to closing the digital skills gap, as currently, the EU has a significant and systemic gap between market needs and what is offered in terms of skills related to advanced digital technologies. Gains from major breakthroughs in digital technologies cannot materialise if there are not enough people to develop, deploy and use those technologies and their related applications. Evidence from the Structured Dialogue on digital education and skills with Member States shows that a majority of Member States expressed concerns about the shortage of ICT specialists.⁶ Even in Member States that are digital frontrunners, there is a persistent shortage of people able to develop and deploy key digital technologies.⁷ There is also a significant increase in the demand for professionals combining sectoral knowledge with digital skills enabling the use of digital solutions for specific business cases. This is, for example, the case of employees in the manufacturing sector able to use augmented reality/virtual reality (AR/VR) tools to repair engines remotely, software developers and engineers with specific automotive expertise, or professionals in green transition industries who are increasingly relying on advanced digital technologies in the development of renewable energy or clean and smart mobility solutions. These profiles can be referred to as users of advanced digital technologies and they are crucial to enable the digitalisation of traditional industries from agriculture and finance to manufacturing, automotive and medicine.

Scope

The primary objective of this call topic is to support the design and delivery of higher education programme(s), such as bachelor's and master's leading to a degree (at ISCED levels 6, 7 or equivalent - hereafter programmes) and to develop related self-standing modules (online, hybrid or in-person) leading to a certification. These programme(s) and module(s) need to be co-designed jointly between higher education institutions, and industry and/or research partners in the consortium. The

⁵ The term 'actions' refers to projects funded under this call topic.

⁶ SWD(2023) 205 final: COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT accompanying the documents: Proposal for a Council Recommendation on the key enabling factors for successful digital education and training and Proposal for a Council Recommendation on improving the provision of digital skills in education and training {COM(2023) 205 final}.

⁷ For example, over 70% of enterprises looking for ICT specialists in the Netherlands, Finland and Luxembourg found it extremely difficult to recruit ICT specialists. DESI 2022, available at: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/digital-economy-and-society-index-desi-2022>.

choice of the type(s) of programme(s) and self-standing module(s), as well as the precise curricula and the modalities (e.g. bachelor or master programme; single or joint degree; academic or professional programme, etc.) is left to the consortium, provided that they all result in a degree (applicable for programme(s)) and certification (applicable for self-standing module(s)) released by the higher education institution(s). For the education programme(s) and self-standing module(s), consortia are highly encouraged to include practice-oriented components (e.g. acquisition of practical experience in a company/organisation, visits of industry facilities or research organisations, etc.).

Proposals under this topic must address the design and delivery of at least one of the following types of programmes:

1. Type 1: Programme(s) to build up advanced digital skills in one or in a combination of the following key digital areas (this list is not exhaustive, however below areas are the digital key areas that are highly encouraged):
 - a. Artificial intelligence⁸
 - b. Blockchain
 - c. Cloud and/or edge computing
 - d. Cybersecurity⁹
 - e. Data
 - f. Extended reality
 - g. Internet of Things
 - h. Microelectronics
 - i. Photonics
 - j. Quantum technologies¹⁰
 - k. Robotics

2. Type 2: Interdisciplinary programme(s), targeting at the acquisition of advanced digital skills in specific sectors. Sectors to be addressed include (the list is not exhaustive):
 - a. Agriculture
 - b. Energy
 - c. Finance
 - d. Health
 - e. Law
 - f. Media and culture
 - g. Manufacturing
 - h. Sustainable and autonomous mobility
 - i. Space

3. Type 3: Conversion programme(s) for students graduated from a bachelor's programme from non-ICT fields to access specialised master's programmes in the areas listed above in point 1.

⁸ Proposals in the area of artificial intelligence should aim at synergies and complementarities with the existing networks of excellence ([Horizon2020 EU ICT 48](#)) and projects funded by the [Connecting Europe Facility Telecom](#).

⁹ For proposals in cybersecurity, it is encouraged to make reference to the classification of knowledge areas of the [JRC's European Cybersecurity Taxonomy](#). The applicants should also take into account the [CyberSec4Europe's review](#) of European MSC programmes in cybersecurity. Security-by-design and privacy-by-design elements should be mandatory.

¹⁰ For proposals in quantum, it is encouraged to make reference to the competence [framework on quantum technologies](#).

All programmes should also address learning outcomes related to societal challenges of today, e.g. Sustainable Development Goals and facilitate understanding and uptake of ethical principles for trustworthy technologies. Proposals are also encouraged to include in the designed programme(s) or self-standing module(s) dedicated interdisciplinary courses from other relevant academic disciplines, in particular from the social sciences and humanities addressing specific challenges and opportunities related to the use of advanced digital technologies.

Consortia can deliver more than one programme leading to a degree (irrespective if they choose type 1, 2 or 3) and are required to additionally develop self-standing modules (online, hybrid or in-person) leading to a certification.

Each participating higher education institution (minimum 3; see section Targeted stakeholders) needs to offer and deliver the programme to a minimum of 25 students per programme cycle. In this respect, delivering a joint master is not a requirement of this call topic. At least one full cycle of the programme should be delivered and at least one second cycle of the programme should start during the duration of the project (48 months). This results in a minimum of at least 150 students enrolled in the programme(s) during the duration of the project (min. 3 institutions, min. 25 students per programme cycle, min. 2 cycles). The consortium should aim at training at least 150 additional students through self-standing modules during the duration of the project. High priority will be given to consortia that have high ambitions in terms of the number of students trained and successfully completing the programme(s) and module(s) as well as delivering excellent programmes and modules.

Projects funded under this topic will be requested to collaborate with the Coordination and support action (CSA) selected by the call topic DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05-SPECIAL-PROGEDU. This CSA will provide different support and collaboration activities to the projects selected under this topic (please consult the call text further down in this document). Moreover, projects funded under this call topic will also be requested to collaborate with the Digital Skills and Jobs Platform¹¹.

Projects funded under this topic are further encouraged to build complementarities with actions on technology deployment supported by other pillars of the Digital Europe Programme and strengthen complementarities with Erasmus+ , European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIHs), European Universities Alliances, and with the Deep Tech Talent Initiative, as well as the Large-Scale Partnerships under the Pact for Skills.

Additionally, projects funded under this topic will be requested to collect data from the participants of the programme(s) and self-standing module(s) related to the performance indicators set by the Digital Europe Programme¹², namely Indicator 1 (Persons who have received training to acquire advanced digital skills) and 3 (People reporting improved employment situation after the end of the training supported by the Programme), if feasible within the duration of the projects, for Specific Objective 4: Promote advanced digital skills to address the shortage of digital experts, particularly in key technological areas¹³.

Proposals can request a contribution of up to EUR 10 million as a lump sum grant, with a duration of up to 4 years, with a co-financing rate of 50%. Consequently, this

¹¹ <https://digital-skills-jobs.europa.eu/en>

¹² https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/performance-and-reporting/programme-performance-statements/digital-europe-programme-performance_en#programme-in-a-nutshell

¹³ Further information can be found here by downloading the Programme statement: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/performance-and-reporting/programme-performance-statements/digital-europe-programme-performance_en#archived-versions-from-previous-years

does not preclude submission and selection of proposals with different duration or for other amounts.

The proposed project(s) must address **at least objective 1** and one or more of objectives 2-4:

1. Design and deliver programme(s) and self-standing module(s) that provide students with the necessary theoretical and practical advanced digital skills and knowledge to contribute to the design, deployment and use of the current and future generation of digital technologies and equip users of advanced digital technologies in non-ICT sectors with the necessary advanced digital skills;
2. Attracting qualified teaching staff and students;
3. Upgrading participating higher education institutions with digital solutions, equipment and infrastructure, with a special focus on interoperability of IT systems;
4. Establishing structural and sustainable partnerships between the members of the consortium.

The proposals are encouraged to provide details in line with the below points for each award criterion.

Proposals are highly encouraged to cover the following points explicitly under the RELEVANCE criteria:

- Explicitly list which of the objectives above are fully covered and which are partially or not covered by the proposal (at least two objectives must be fully covered, among one of them is objective 1).
- Briefly explain the main activities covered by each chosen objective.
- Explain how the programme(s) and self-standing module(s) address(es) current and future labour market needs and will contribute to train either ICT specialists or users of advanced digital technology in a given sector.
- Explain how the programme(s) and self-standing module(s) is/are designed in order to take into consideration all relevant new developments and trends regarding digital technologies and labour market needs.
- Explain what the added value of the programme(s) is compared to existing offers.
- Explain how the programme(s) and self-standing module(s) contribute to closing the advanced digital skills gap.
- Explain how students will be educated to design, develop or use digital technologies and applications in line with the EU values and ethics throughout the curriculum.

Proposals are highly encouraged to cover the following points explicitly under the IMPLEMENTATION criteria:

- **For Objective 1 – addressing skills needs (relevant for all)**
 - Describe the details of the awarded degree(s) (e.g. single, double or joint degree) and the type of certification awarded for self-standing module(s).

- Briefly describe how the programme(s) and self-standing module(s) will be co-designed jointly between members of the consortium (in particular between higher education institutions and industry partners).
 - Broadly explain how the programme(s) and self-standing module(s) will be structured, including describing the main content of a proposed curricula, as well as a description of the practice-oriented components.
- **For Objective 2 (relevant only if addressed by the proposal) – Attracting qualified teaching staff and students**

2.1 *Teaching staff*

- Explain how the programme(s) and self-standing module(s) will offer lectures and seminars by highly qualified experts in digital technologies, both from the public and private sector.
- Explain what incentives will be provided to attract highly qualified and renowned teaching and research staff (including from third countries) to contribute to the delivery of the programme(s) and self-standing module(s).
- Explain what steps will be taken to attract female teaching staff and experts to participate in the design and deployment of programme(s) and self-standing module(s), and initiatives offered.
- Explain what activities are considered to encourage the mobility of the teaching staff across the institutions participating in the consortium (in particular between the industry partners and participating higher education institutions).

2.2 *Students*

- Explain how students who hold the nationality of an EU and/or of another Digital Europe Programme eligible country will be financially supported (e.g. via scholarships, fee waivers or others) to participate in the programme(s) or self-standing module(s). Explain how the financial support will ensure diversity in terms of gender, socio-economic background, etc. This support can take the form of financial support to third parties up to 20% of the EU funding.
- Explain, if such initiative is taken up by the proposal, how students will be financially supported to acquire practical experience either with members of the consortium or with companies and organisations outside the consortium (e.g. via internships or short-term job placements). This support can take the form of financial support to third parties, whereas the total amount of the proposal's financial support to third parties can be up to 20% of the EU funding.
- Explain how student mobility between higher education institutions is encouraged and how complementarity and coordination with other mobility programmes (in particular Erasmus+) is achieved.

For Objective 3 (relevant only if addressed by the proposal) – Upgrading digital solutions, equipment and infrastructure, with a special focus on interoperability of IT systems across participating Higher education institutions

- Explain if and how digital solutions, equipment and infrastructure will be purchased/leased to ensure the programme(s) and self-standing module(s) have the necessary facilities to deliver excellence¹⁴.
- Explain how higher education institutions of the consortium, at least 2, will be equipped for interoperability, e.g. with transnational (virtual) campuses, shared equipment and libraries of learning content.
- Explain how the project will explore the innovative use of digital tools and solutions to support the functioning of the education programme(s) and self-standing module(s), such as the cross-border verification of educational credentials piloted by the [European Blockchain Service Infrastructure](#) or other solutions.
- **For Objective 4 (relevant only if addressed by the proposal) - Establishing structural and sustainable partnerships**
 - Explain how the partnerships between the members of the consortium will be sustainable over time and will achieve a high degree of integration.

Proposals are highly encouraged to cover the following points explicitly under the IMPACT criteria:

Outreach

- Describe the communication and dissemination activities particularly targeting high school pupils, bachelor's/master's students as well as employees in the digital areas and specialised sectors, to raise awareness regarding the programme(s) and self-standing module(s).
- Describe how information of the self-standing module(s) is disseminated to the interested general public.
- Describe how information about the new programme(s) and self-standing module(s) are published on online platforms that provide information on available education offers, including programmes' details (e.g. name, description, list of courses, length, field of study in which the course is taught, etc.) and institution details (e.g. name of the university, country).
- Explain how the programme(s) and self-standing module(s) will be showcased and promoted on the Digital Skills and Jobs Platform¹⁵.

Outcomes and deliverables

Proposals selected for funding, depending on their chosen objectives' coverage, will be required to demonstrate by the end of the action that:

- The programme(s) and self-standing module(s) are offered and taught to students enrolled in all higher education institutions participating in the action (relevant for all proposals);

¹⁴ Depreciation cost is eligible.

¹⁵ <https://digital-skills-jobs.europa.eu/en>

- Support (financial or other) has been provided to students in order to take part in the programme(s) or in job placements/internships (relevant if objective 2 is addressed);
- Technical equipment/digital tools have been upgraded for the delivery of the education programme(s) and self-standing module(s) (relevant if objective 3 is addressed);
- Structural partnerships have been established among the members of the consortium (relevant if objective 4 is addressed);
- A sustainability strategy has been developed and agreed by the consortium for enabling the continuity of the programme(s) and self-standing module(s) after the funded project's lifetime (relevant for all proposals);
- The programme(s) and self-standing module(s) are promoted (via communication and dissemination activities) and information is available on the Digital Skills and Jobs Platform (relevant for all proposals).

KPIs to measure outcomes and deliverables

The KPIs to measure outcomes and deliverables should be provided by the consortium depending on their chosen coverage of objectives of this topic. KPIs should address the proposal's covered points under the 'Scope' section. Priority will be given to consortia who provide realistic, relevant, qualitative and quantitative KPIs that best reflect the proposal's main outcomes and deliverables.

The following KPIs should be included as a minimum:

- Number of higher education institutions in the consortia offering the new programme(s) and self-standing module(s);
- Number of students, enrolled in the programme(s) and self-standing module(s), including number of female students as well as students from lower socio-economic backgrounds;
- Completion rate of students (minimum 80%) who have successfully completed the programme(s) and self-standing module(s) in the time foreseen by the action;
- Number of students benefitting from financial or other support during the duration of the project (e.g. scholarships, internships), if applicable;
- Number of newly recruited qualified and renowned teaching and research staff, if applicable;
- Number of collaborations between higher education institutions and industry, if applicable (e.g. number of seminars/lectures held by industry experts, etc.).

Targeted stakeholders

The participating consortium members should demonstrate complementary roles in the proposal and demonstrate an outstanding track record in their respective fields.

The consortium is highly recommended to include at least three degree awarding higher education institutions from three different eligible countries which are part of

the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE)¹⁶. Higher education institutions established in other eligible countries which are not part of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education can also be included in the consortium. In this case, the consortium has to prove that the specific higher education institution is recognised by the competent national authority and offers full study programmes leading to higher education degrees and recognised diplomas at tertiary education qualifications levels.

In addition to this, it is highly recommended for consortia to include a minimum of two industry partners whose headquarters are located in two different eligible countries. The consortium is also encouraged to particularly involve small and medium enterprises (SMEs) as well as start-ups.

The consortium is also encouraged to include at least one additional independent research organisation/hub or competence/excellence centre. In the proposal, the consortium is encouraged to demonstrate the relevance of this partner by referring to aspects such as the points below, but not limited to them:

- The number of patent applications in the areas identified within the scope of this call topic (section 2);
- The number of papers accepted in conferences and published in scientific journals on the above-mentioned areas;
- The number of relevant national or EU funded projects (H2020, etc.).

Particular attention should be given to:

- Ensuring inclusivity in Europe and help widening the specialised education offer in all Member States with a special focus on those Member States that score low in terms of advanced digital skills levels, according to the Digital Economy and Society Index;
- Inclusion of industry partners, in particular start-ups and SMEs, but also other public or private entities that can be instrumental for the delivery of the actions requested by this call topic;
- Close collaboration with other stakeholders that provide technical expertise and experimentation and testing facilities (e.g. with European Digital Innovation Hubs) is highly encouraged.

Please note that higher education institutions already delivering similar programmes as the ones addressed by the proposal addressing this call topic can participate. However, they must explain the added value of the newly designed programme(s) and self-standing module(s) compared to the existing education offer delivered in the latest academic years.

European Universities alliances selected under the Erasmus+ programme and other alliances of higher education institutions are also encouraged to participate, provided that they include the necessary partners requested and they fulfil all the objectives outlined in this section.

Type of action

Lump sums — 50% funding rate



For more information on Digital Europe types of action, see Annex 1.

¹⁶ <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/document/higher-education-institutions-holding-an-eche-2021-2027>

Specific topic conditions

- For this topic, multi-beneficiary applications are mandatory and specific conditions for the consortium composition apply (*see section 6*)
- For this topic, the following reimbursement option for equipment costs applies: depreciation cost only (*see section 10*). The lump sum for equipment costs should be calculated with depreciation costs in the detailed budget table.
- For this topic, financial support to third parties is allowed (*see section 10*)
- The following parts of the award criteria in section 9 are exceptionally NOT applicable for this topic:
 - extent to which the project would reinforce and secure the digital technology supply chain in the Union*
 - extent to which the proposal can overcome financial obstacles such as the lack of market finance*
 - extent to which the proposal addresses environmental sustainability and the European Green Deal goals, in terms of direct effects and/or in awareness of environmental effects*

DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05-CYBERACADEMY - Cybersecurity Skills AcademyObjectives

There is a need to have more cybersecurity professionals to meet increasing market needs and legal obligations. This is a worldwide challenge. Currently, around 200,000 cybersecurity experts are missing in Europe. Legislative initiatives on cybersecurity such as the recently revised Directive on measures for a high common level of cybersecurity across the Union (NIS2 Directive)¹⁷ or the Cyber Resilience Act¹⁸ proposal, and sector-specific legislation including provisions on cybersecurity, will put even more pressure on companies and public authorities to have access to cybersecurity specialists.

To address these challenges, many actions have been deployed in Europe, also from the European Commission, including support from previous DIGITAL calls. However, there is a further need to prevent actions and resources from being scattered and insufficient. Therefore, the Commission adopted the Cybersecurity Skills Academy initiative in Spring 2023¹⁹. The Cybersecurity Skills Academy will be implemented by the European Commission, the European Cybersecurity Competence Centre (ECCC) and the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA). The Academy constitutes a European framework for action, providing political goals and mechanisms for cooperation, to integrate various learning and training activities with the objective of increasing their visibility, accessibility and impact. Those activities should align along

¹⁷ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2022/2555>

¹⁸ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/cyber-resilience-act>

¹⁹ COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL of 18.4.2023, Closing the cybersecurity talent gap to boost the EU's competitiveness, growth and resilience ('The Cybersecurity Skills Academy'), COM(2023) 207 final, <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/communication-cybersecurity-skills-academy>

common goals, key performance indicators (KPIs) and a joined-up communication strategy to seek greater impact.

The activities that could be funded under this Topic are described below.

Scope

Proposals should address **only one** of the following Activities (either Activity 1 or 2):

1) Training programmes for SMEs, start-ups and the public sector for the Cybersecurity Skills Academy

Proposals addressing this Activity are expected to implement new training opportunities or scale up successful existing ones with a special focus on the needs of Small and Medium Size Enterprises (SMEs) and public administrations in the area of cybersecurity. The proposed training should consider businesses' needs and in particular facilitate access to cybersecurity talents for SMEs and start-ups across all sectors. To ensure the high levels of cybersecurity necessary for digital public administration, the trainings should cater for the upskilling, reskilling and interdisciplinary understanding of cybersecurity for civil servants.

Consortia of organisations active in the domain of cybersecurity and universities or training providers should devise and deliver relevant training activities. Activities must include, among others, the identification of relevant training courses, including bootcamps on specific cybersecurity topics, jointly vetted with industrial partners that would enhance employability of trainees or increase cybersecurity capabilities of public servants, communication actions for promoting the courses, etc. Applicants may propose online and physical training; however, online training courses are particularly recommended. The involvement of the national Cybersecurity Competence Centres (NCCs)²⁰, in the framework of the European Cybersecurity Competence Centre (ECCC), is expected to address specific needs at national level, where significant variations exist as to the level of cybersecurity readiness. More specifically, proposals should build on the work of the NCCs on cyber skills, as available, as well as cooperate with the NCCs and relevant members of the cyber community in this area. More broadly, proposals should demonstrate their contribution to the objectives and activities of the Cybersecurity Skills Academy, as set out in the Communication COM (2023) 207 final²¹ and implemented by the Commission, the ECCC and ENISA.

It is intended that more proposals will be funded under Activity 1 (please refer to section 10, 'Form of grant, funding rate and maximum grant amount' for expected grant amounts). Proposals selected under this Activity shall closely cooperate with the proposal selected under Activity 2 below.

2) The Cybersecurity Skills Academy: support operations

Proposals addressing this Activity are expected to support the operations of the Academy and its governance, in the following way:

²⁰ https://cybersecurity-centre.europa.eu/nccs_en

²¹ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/communication-cybersecurity-skills-academy>

- Propose a framework to measure the impact of the different actions considered under the scope of the Academy as defined in the Communication 'The Cybersecurity Skills Academy' (COM (2023) 207 final);
- Bring together relevant players from all Member States to contribute towards monitoring of the cybersecurity skills landscape, follow up its evolution and take action to advise and support Member States develop specialised training programmes, in particular addressing cybersecurity of SMEs as well as public administrations to address the cybersecurity skills gap;
- Work in close coordination with the ECCC / NCCs and ENISA, as well as relevant EU-funded projects, in particular projects on cyber skills funded under the DIGITAL Europe Programme in this and previous relevant calls²²;
- Explore, define and set up an impactful scheme promoting the standardisation of procedures for cybersecurity competence recognition and professional certification in the European market, while using ENISA's European Cybersecurity Skills Framework (ECSF)²³ as a basis;
- Promote the development and the use of up-to-date curricula in cybersecurity;
- Perform communication around this initiative including dissemination of results, outcomes and impact, to engage and facilitate interactions between relevant stakeholders;
- Leverage available tools, such as the Digital Skills & Jobs Platform²⁴ and/or ENISA's CyberHEAD database²⁵, to support the Academy and integrate the existing best practices that will feed the Academy.

It is intended that only one proposal will be funded under Activity 2. The typical size of a project under this Activity should be up to 2M EUR of the EU grant amount.

Please note that activities relating to the functioning of the organisation (e.g. installing/outfitting of training and/or meeting rooms with floors, electrical systems, air conditioning, furniture, physical security controls, fire sensors, cables and sockets, etc.) will not be supported under this Topic²⁶.

Additionally, projects funded under this topic will be requested to collaborate with the Coordination and support action (CSA) selected by the call topic DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05-SPECIAL-PROGEDU. This CSA will provide different support and collaboration activities to the projects selected under this topic and complimentary support to the Activity 2 will be explored (please consult call text further down in this document for the CSA topic).

²² Notably projects such as CyberSecPro, Cyrus, Concordia or REWIRE

²³ <https://www.enisa.europa.eu/topics/education/european-cybersecurity-skills-framework>

²⁴ <https://digital-skills-jobs.europa.eu/en>

²⁵ <https://www.enisa.europa.eu/topics/education/cyberhead/>

²⁶ This call for proposals does not include operating grants within the meaning of Article 180(2)(b) of the Financial Regulation applicable to the general budget of the EU (Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 July 2018, see <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32018R1046>). These types of activities/costs are related to the functioning of an applicant's organisation rather than to the actual implementation of the proposed project, and therefore would not be considered as eligible activities/costs for this call.

Outcomes and deliverables

The expected **deliverables** must include the following **in line with Activity 1**:

- Trainings to address the most in-demand skills, including but not limited to, cyber-forensics, cyber ranges, malware analysis and artificial intelligence (AI) for cybersecurity among others;
- On-the-job trainings and traineeships opportunities for SMEs and for public administrations in innovative companies in cybersecurity and cybersecurity competence centres;
- Online training, user friendly and accessible to everyone in all EU languages;
- The availability of the training courses in at least 3 EU languages through available EU platforms, such as the Digital Skills & Jobs Platform or through ENISA's repository.

The expected outcomes of the projects addressing Activity 1 should include increase in high-quality European cybersecurity trainings and boosted cybersecurity skills of people in Europe.

The expected **deliverables** must include the following **in line with Activity 2**:

- Approach for establishing a cybersecurity competence recognition and professional certification in the European market, considering standardisation of cyber skills;
- Measurement framework and its monitoring during the proposed project's duration, along the goals of the Academy in line with its related Communication;
- Cooperation framework with relevant players, public and private, from across the EU, including representatives from Member States, the ECCC and ENISA, as well as EU-funded projects on cyber skills, notably projects funded under the Digital Europe Programme;
- Promotion and communication approach, leveraging existing channels and platforms, including the Digital Skills and Jobs Platform.

The expected outcomes of the projects addressing Activity 2 should include successful analysis, collaboration and communication activities supporting the goals of the Cybersecurity Skills Academy.

KPIs to measure outcomes and deliverables

The expected **KPIs corresponding to Activity 1** should include:

- Number of trainings to address the most in-demand cyber skills;
- Number of on-the-job trainings and traineeships opportunities for SMEs and for public administrations in innovative companies in cybersecurity and cybersecurity competence centres;

- Number of available trainings and education opportunities communicated through the Digital Skills & Jobs Platform and/or ENISA's CyberHEAD database;
- Number of persons who have successfully completed the trainings.

The expected **KPIs corresponding to Activity 2** should include:

- Number of relevant players cooperating in support of the Cybersecurity Skills Academy and contributing to its goals;
- Relevant initiatives of cyber skills identified;
- Number of promotion activities on relevant cyber skills initiatives;
- Degree of reach out of awareness campaigns conducted;
- Number of respondents (target audience) reached through the communication performed;
- Degree of support to strategies on cybersecurity skills from public and private players and contribution to alignment of these strategies achieved by the cooperation network.

The applicants should propose the target KPIs to be achieved during the proposed projects commensurate to the EU funding requested.

Targeted stakeholders

Consortia applying for funding under this Topic may be composed of the following types of entities: higher education institutions, vocational education and training institutions, public administration services, research organisations, businesses and national cybersecurity competence centres.

Type of action

Simple Grants — 50% funding rate



For more information on Digital Europe types of action, see Annex 1.

Specific topic conditions

- For this topic, multi-beneficiary applications are mandatory and specific conditions for the consortium composition apply (see section 6)
- For this topic, the following reimbursement option for equipment costs applies: depreciation and full cost for listed equipment (see section 10)
- For this topic, financial support to third parties is allowed (see section 10)
- The following parts of the award criteria in section 9 are exceptionally NOT applicable for this topic:
 - extent to which the project would reinforce and secure the digital technology supply chain in the Union*
 - extent to which the proposal can overcome financial obstacles such as the lack of market finance*

- extent to which the proposal addresses environmental sustainability and the European Green Deal goals, in terms of direct effects and/or in awareness of environmental effects*

DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05-SPECIAL-PROGEDU - Specialised Education Programmes in Key Capacity Areas - Advanced digital skills analysis

Objectives

This action will deliver insights into the changing advanced digital skills demands in the EU, by gathering inputs on the existing education and training offers in the area of advanced digital skills and to what extent the current education and training offers match the needs of the current and future labour market. This action will recommend priority areas for upcoming funding programmes in the area of advanced digital skills and give indications on which type of education programmes and training is most effective for building up advanced digital skills. This action should contribute to support excellence in education and training institutions, to support the development of a dynamic digital education and training ecosystem in the area of advanced digital skills and to increase collaboration between the different consortia awarded from the different call topics of the Digital Europe Programme – Strategic Objective 4 – Advanced Digital Skills²⁷ (hereafter DIGITAL-SO4).

Scope

The proposed project is required to include the following activities:

1. Based on the work carried out by the prior DIGITAL-SO4 action LEADS²⁸, as well as based on existing literature and mapping exercises²⁹, collect information on the advanced digital skills needed by companies and the public sector related to different advanced digital technologies (e.g. AI) and to specific sectors (e.g. health). These analyses should give a general overview of how needs by companies and the public sector are evolving and detect the main trends in emerging advanced digital skills needs per each key technology area and in specific sectors. These analyses should be compared with the existing education and training offer (particularly based on a detailed analysis of the DIGITAL-SO4 funded actions³⁰), in order to come forward with a clear gap analysis to identify whether there is a need for more educational programmes or training courses in the area of advanced digital skills. These analyses should be performed on a yearly basis and should result in recommendations, mainly with regard to which key digital areas and which specific sectors should be prioritised in upcoming future work programmes of the Digital Europe Programme in the

²⁷ The already awarded consortia from the DIGITAL-SO4 topics can be found on the following links: [DIGITAL-2021-SKILLS-01-SPECIALISED](#), [DIGITAL-2022-TRAINING-02-SHORT-COURSES](#) and [DIGITAL-2022-SKILLS-02-INNOVATE-EDU](#). This action should additionally involve the consortia from the selected proposals of the closed call [DIGITAL-2022-SKILLS-03-SPECIALISED-EDU](#) as well as the future awarded consortia from the current open calls [DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-04-SEMICONDUCTORS](#) and [DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-04-BOOSTINGDIGIT](#) as well as the future awarded consortia of any future DIGITAL-SO4 calls. For this, please consult the DIGITAL work programmes: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/activities/work-programmes-digital>.

²⁸ <https://advancedskills.eu/>

²⁹ For example, OECD and JRC reports (e.g. [JRC Publications Repository - Supporting policies addressing the digital skills gap \(europa.eu\)](#), [JRC Publications Repository - Academic Offer of Advanced Digital Skills in 2020-21. International Comparison \(europa.eu\)](#)).

³⁰ The term 'actions' refers to projects funded under DIGITAL-SO4 calls.

area of advanced digital skills. This activity needs to be performed in close collaboration with the involved European Commission services.

2. Based on desk research, detailed analyses of the outputs of all DIGITAL-SO4 actions as well as based on consulting consortium members of the DIGITAL-SO4 funded actions (e.g. by running focus groups, structured interviews or surveys), regularly provide insights, explore lessons learned and propose best practices on how to:
 - Better match the education programmes and training to needs of companies and the public sector;
 - Increase excellence of the learning content and its components of the education programmes and training (e.g. by including practice-oriented activities);
 - Increase cooperation between higher education institutions and research and industry partners (especially SMEs and start-ups) in designing and implementing education programmes and training;
 - Increase the involvement of female ICT specialists in the design and delivery of education programmes and training;
 - Increase attractiveness of the education programmes and training for students and training participants (and in particular female students and training participants);
 - Help retaining graduates to be employed in the EU after completion of the education programmes and training;
 - Help retaining and attracting highly skilled teaching staff (including from third countries), in particular female teaching staff;
 - Attract teaching staff from industry to higher education institutions;
 - Most efficiently purchase or lease digital solutions, equipment and infrastructure to deliver excellence in educational programmes and training.
3. Conduct surveys with consortia implementing DIGITAL-SO4 actions to find out which additional support requests consortia would need most. Deploy and carry out the most relevant support measures. Provide suggestions on what activities could be further implemented to create an ecosystem between higher education institutions and research and industry partners (especially SMEs and start-ups).
4. Foster coordination between the different consortia of DIGITAL-SO4 actions (e.g. by supporting the Commission in organising regular yearly meetings with consortia implementing DIGITAL-SO4 actions, by creating databases with names, contact details and area of expertise of experts from different consortia in order to facilitate their exchange and collaboration; organise additional meetings and structures to facilitate exchange between the different consortia, etc.).
5. Conduct awareness-raising campaigns for the educational programmes and trainings of DIGITAL-SO4 calls and their related activities. This includes also contributing to the upcoming dedicated webpage on the Digital Skills and Jobs platform and building a brand of excellence.

6. Support the actions to strengthen the dialogue between consortia implementing DIGITAL-SO4 actions and relevant other stakeholders from their targeted field (e.g. technology providers, industry associations and investors, policy makers and ministries, research organisations and experts). Map relevant stakeholders, initiatives, activities, funded projects and so forth in the actions targeting digital areas and specific sectors at EU and national level. Map additional (co-)funding opportunities for actions.
7. Provide a detailed analysis of data collected from the DIGITAL-SO4 actions via a questionnaire which is part of the actions' mandatory periodic reporting to the Commission on different performance indicators³¹, namely Indicator 1 (Persons who have received training to acquire advanced digital skills) and 3 (People reporting improved employment situation after the end of the training supported by the Programme). Conduct an additional representative survey with students and learners from the DIGITAL-SO4 actions and from similar programmes to gather representative and comparable data for Indicator 3.

Outcomes and deliverables

The proposal selected for funding will be required to demonstrate the following outcomes and deliverables:

- That information based on the desk research and surveys of the DIGITAL-SO4 consortia on the skills needs, sectoral needs and existing education programmes and training gaps in the area of advanced digital skills have been collected, analysed and have been published.
- That recommendations regarding priority digital areas and specific sectors for the upcoming future funding work programmes of the Digital Europe Programme in the area of advanced digital skills are put forward to the European Commission on a yearly basis.
- That analyses of the awarded actions under DIGITAL-SO4 calls have been completed and published, highlighting good examples and formulating suggestions on how to further encourage the development of excellent education programmes and training in digital areas and specific sectors.
- That support has been provided to the different consortia and its members awarded in the context of DIGITAL-SO4 calls, with a view of maximising exchanges and scaling up successful activities.
- That the promotion and dissemination activities related to the education and training opportunities available as a result of DIGITAL-SO4 actions have been carried out.
- That analyses and the survey related to Digital Europe Programme indicators have been carried out and published.

³¹ https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/performance-and-reporting/programme-performance-statements/digital-europe-programme-performance_en#programme-in-a-nutshell
Further information can be found here by downloading the Programme statement: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/performance-and-reporting/programme-performance-statements/digital-europe-programme-performance_en#archived-versions-from-previous-years

KPIs

- Number of analyses, surveys conducted;
- Number of collaboration and support activities for DIGITAL-SO4 actions conducted;
- Number of recommendations provided on how to best support education and training opportunities in the area of advanced digital skills (related to specific technologies and specific sectors);
- Number of communication and dissemination activities carried out.

Targeted stakeholders

The consortium should demonstrate a good expertise in the design and deployment of analyses, surveys and evaluation actions related to advanced digital technologies and digital skills, as well as supporting and coordination actions for ecosystems and networks in this field.

Moreover, the consortium should demonstrate knowledge and expertise in terms of the state of play and needs of educational and training institutions and companies (especially SMEs) related to the research, development and application of advanced digital technologies and digital skills.

Type of action

CSA – 100% funding rate



For more information on Digital Europe types of action, see Annex 1.

Specific topic conditions

- For this topic, multi-beneficiary applications are mandatory and specific conditions for the consortium composition apply (*see section 6*)
- For this topic, the following reimbursement option for equipment costs applies: depreciation and full cost for listed equipment (*see section 10*)
- The following parts of the award criteria in section 9 are exceptionally NOT applicable for this topic:
 - extent to which the project would reinforce and secure the digital technology supply chain in the Union*
 - extent to which the proposal can overcome financial obstacles such as the lack of market finance*
 - extent to which the proposal addresses environmental sustainability and the European Green Deal goals, in terms of direct effects and/or in awareness of environmental effects*

3. Available budget

The available call budget is **EUR 42 000 000**.

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

Topic	Topic budget
DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05-SPECIALISED-EDU	EUR 30.000.000
DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05-CYBERACADEMY	EUR 10.000.000
DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05-SPECIAL-PROGEDU	EUR 2.000.000

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:	21 November 2023
<u>Deadline for submission:</u>	<u>21 March 2024 – 17:00:00 CET (Brussels)</u>
Evaluation:	April - May 2024
Information on evaluation results:	June 2024
GA signature:	December 2024

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 [Search Funding & Tenders](#) section). Paper submissions are NOT possible.

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

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

- Application Form Part A — contains administrative information about the participants (future coordinator, beneficiaries and affiliated entities) and the summarised budget for the project (*to be filled in directly online*)
- Application Form Part B — contains the technical description of the project (*to be downloaded from the Portal Submission System, completed and then assembled and re-uploaded*)
- **mandatory annexes and supporting documents** (*to be uploaded WHEN APPLICABLE ONLY*):

For topic **DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05-SPECIALISED-EDU (Lump Sum Grants)**

- detailed budget table: **applicable**

Please be aware that since the detailed budget table serves as the basis for fixing the lump sums for the grants (and since lump sums must be reliable proxies for the actual costs of a project), the costs you include **MUST** comply with the basic eligibility conditions for EU actual cost grants (see [AGA – Annotated Grant Agreement, art 6](#)). This is particularly important for purchases and subcontracting, which must comply with best value for money (or if appropriate the lowest price) and be free of any conflict of interests. If the budget table contains ineligible costs, the grant may be reduced (even later on during the project implementation or after its end).

- CVs of core project team: not applicable
- activity reports of last year: not applicable
- list of previous projects: **applicable**
- ownership control declaration: not applicable

For topic **DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05-CYBERACADEMY (Simple Grants)**

- detailed budget table: not applicable
- CVs of core project team: not applicable
- activity reports of last year: not applicable
- list of previous projects: **applicable**
- ownership control declaration: not applicable

For topic **DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05-SPECIAL-PROGEDU (CSA)**

- detailed budget table: not applicable
- CVs of core project team: not applicable
- activity reports of last year: not applicable
- list of previous projects: **applicable**
- ownership control declaration: not applicable

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 **70 pages** (Part B) but **50 pages** (Part B) for **CSA (DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05-SPECIAL-PROGEDU)**. 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 Digital Europe Programme ([associated countries](#)^(OCT)) or countries which are in ongoing negotiations for an association agreement and where the agreement enters into force before grant signature

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

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, unless they are International organisations of European Interest within the meaning of Article 2 of the Digital Europe Regulation (i.e. international organisations the majority of whose members are Member States or whose headquarters are in a Member State).

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.

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'³².  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 (*see above*) may participate in the call and can sign grants

³² For the definitions, see Articles 187(2) and 197(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

if the negotiations are concluded before grant signature (with retroactive effect, if provided in the agreement).

Following the [Council Implementing Decision \(EU\) 2022/2506](#), as of 16th December 2022, no legal commitments (including the grant agreement itself as well as subcontracts, purchase contracts, financial support to third parties etc.) can be signed with Hungarian public interest trusts established under Hungarian Act IX of 2021 or any entity they maintain.

Affected entities may continue to apply to calls for proposals. However, in case the Council measures are not lifted, such entities are not eligible to participate in any funded role (beneficiaries, affiliated entities, subcontractors, recipients of financial support to third parties). In this case, co-applicants will be invited to remove or replace that entity and/or to change its status into associated partner. Tasks and budget may be redistributed accordingly.

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)³³ and entities covered by Commission Guidelines No [2013/C 205/05](#)³⁴). 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).

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

Consortium composition

Proposals must be submitted by:

- for topic **DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05-SPECIALISED-EDU**

a consortium composed of a minimum 6 applicants (beneficiaries; not affiliated entities) from 5 different eligible countries.

- for topic **DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05-CYBERACADEMY**

a consortium composed of a minimum 3 entities (beneficiaries; not affiliated entities) from 3 different eligible countries OR minimum 1 European digital infrastructure consortium (EDIC) composed of at least 3 Member States³⁵.

³³ 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](#).

³⁴ Commission guidelines No [2013/C 205/05](#) on the eligibility of Israeli entities and their activities in the territories occupied by Israel since June 1967 for grants, prizes and financial instruments funded by the EU from 2014 onwards (OJEU C 205 of 19.07.2013, pp. 9-11).

³⁵ An European Digital Infrastructure Consortium (EDIC) in the process of being established may submit a proposal. If the proposal is retained for funding, such EDIC will have to be officially established before the signature of the grant agreement (see the indicative timing for preparation and signature of grant agreements on the call page on the Funding & Tenders Portal) in line with the Communication COM(2023) 207 final: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/communication-cybersecurity-skills-academy>. This requirement must be fulfilled within the specified timeline; otherwise the Agency reserves the right to cancel the grant agreement preparation.

- for topic **DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05-SPECIAL-PROGEDU** a consortium composed of a minimum of 4 applicants (beneficiaries; not affiliated entities) from 4 different eligible countries.

Eligible activities

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

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

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

Financial support to third parties is allowed in

- **DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05-SPECIALISED-EDU**
- **DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05-CYBERACADEMY**

for grants and prizes under the following conditions:

- the calls must be open, published widely and conform to EU standards concerning transparency, equal treatment, conflict of interest and confidentiality;
- the calls must be published on the Funding & Tenders Portal, and on the participants' websites;
- the calls must remain open for at least two months;
- if call deadlines are changed, this must immediately be published on the Portal and all registered applicants must be informed of the change;
- the outcome of the call 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;
- the calls must have a clear European dimension.

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.

Security

Projects involving EU classified information must undergo security scrutiny to authorise funding and may be made subject to specific security rules (detailed in a security aspects letter (SAL) which is annexed to the Grant Agreement).

These rules (governed by Decision [2015/444](#)³⁶ and its implementing rules and/or national rules) provide for instance that:

- projects involving information classified TRES SECRET UE/EU TOP SECRET (or

³⁶ See Commission Decision 2015/544/EU, Euratom of 13 March 2015 on the security rules for protecting EU classified information (OJ L 72, 17.3.2015, p. 53).

equivalent) can NOT be funded

- classified information must be marked in accordance with the applicable security instructions in the SAL
- information with classification levels CONFIDENTIEL UE/EU CONFIDENTIAL or above (and RESTREINT UE/ EU RESTRICTED, if required by national rules) may be:
 - created or accessed only on premises with facility security clearing (FSC) from the competent national security authority (NSA), in accordance with the national rules
 - handled only in a secured area accredited by the competent NSA
 - accessed and handled only by persons with valid personnel security clearance (PSC) and a need-to-know
- at the end of the grant, the classified information must either be returned or continued to be protected in accordance with the applicable rules
- action tasks involving EU classified information (EUCI) may be subcontracted only with prior written approval from the granting authority and only to entities established in an EU Member State or in a non-EU country with a security of information agreement with the EU (or an administrative arrangement with the Commission)
- disclosure of EUCI to third parties is subject to prior written approval from the granting authority.

Please note that, depending on the type of activity, facility security clearing may have to be provided before grant signature. The granting authority will assess the need for clearing in each case and will establish their delivery date during grant preparation. Please note that in no circumstances can we sign any grant agreement until at least one of the beneficiaries in a consortium has facility security clearing.

Further security recommendations may be added to the Grant Agreement in the form of security deliverables (*e.g. create security advisory group, limit level of detail, use fake scenario, exclude use of classified information, etc*).

Beneficiaries must ensure that their projects are not subject to national/third-country security requirements that could affect implementation or put into question the award of the grant (*e.g. technology restrictions, national security classification, etc*). The granting authority must be notified immediately of any potential security issues.

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).

This capacity will be assessed together with the 'Implementation' 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 operational 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).

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 participate³⁷:

- 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 misconduct³⁸ (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 Regulation No [2988/95](#) (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)
- created under a different jurisdiction with the intent to circumvent fiscal, social or other legal obligations in the country of origin or created another entity with this purpose (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant).

Applicants will also be refused if it turns out that³⁹:

- 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** (composed or 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

³⁷ See Articles 136 and 141 of EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

³⁸ 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.

³⁹ See Article 141 EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

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) Proposals focusing on a theme that is not otherwise covered by higher ranked proposals will be considered to have the highest priority.
- 2) 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 'Implementation'.
- 3) If this does not allow to determine the priority, a further prioritisation can be done by considering the overall proposal portfolio and the creation of positive synergies between proposals, or other factors related to the objectives of the call. These factors will be documented in the panel report.
- 4) 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 are 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:

- **Relevance**
 - Alignment with the objectives and activities as described in section 2

- Contribution to long-term policy objectives, relevant policies and strategies, and synergies with activities at European and national level
- Extent to which the project would reinforce and secure the digital technology supply chain in the EU*
- Extent to which the project can overcome financial obstacles such as the lack of market finance*
- **Implementation**
 - Maturity of the project
 - Soundness of the implementation plan and efficient use of resources
 - Capacity of the applicants, and when applicable the consortium as a whole, to carry out the proposed work
- **Impact**
 - Extent to which the project will achieve the expected outcomes and deliverables referred to in the call for proposals and, where relevant, the plans to disseminate and communicate project achievements
 - Extent to which the project will strengthen competitiveness and bring important benefits for society
 - Extent to which the project addresses environmental sustainability and the European Green Deal goals, in terms of direct effects and/or in awareness of environmental effects *

**May not be applicable to all topics (see specific topic conditions in section 2).*

Award criteria	Minimum pass score	Maximum score
Relevance	3	5
Implementation	3	5
Impact	3	5
Overall (pass) scores	10	15

Maximum points: 15 points.

Individual thresholds per criterion: 3/5, 3/5 and 3/5 points.

Overall threshold: 10 points.

Proposals that pass the individual thresholds AND the overall threshold will be considered for funding – within the limits of the available call budget. 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. Retroactive application can be granted exceptionally for duly justified reasons - but never earlier than the proposal submission date.

Project duration:

- 48 months for topic **DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05-SPECIALISED-EDU**
- 36 months for topic **DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05-CYBERACADEMY**
- 48 months for topic **DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05-SPECIAL-PROGEDU**

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

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.

The following deliverables will be mandatory for all projects:

- additional deliverable on dissemination and exploitation, to be submitted in the first six months of the project

Form of grant, funding rate and maximum grant amount

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

Project budget (maximum grant amount):

- up to EUR 10 M per project for topic **DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05-SPECIALISED-EDU**
- up to 4M EUR per project under Activity 1 and up to 2M EUR per project under Activity 2 for topic **DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05-CYBERACADEMY**
- EUR 2 M per project for topic **DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05-SPECIAL-PROGEDU**

The grant awarded may be lower than the amount requested.

Lump Sum Grant for the Topic DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05-SPECIALISED-EDU

The grant will be a lump sum grant. This means that it will reimburse a fixed amount, based on a lump sum or financing not linked to costs. The amount will be fixed by the granting authority on the basis of the estimated project budget and a funding rate of 50 %.

Actual Cost Grant for the Topic DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05-CYBERACADEMY and DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05-SPECIAL-PROGEDU

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. This rate depends on the type of action which applies to the topic, *see section 2*. 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 and art 6*).

for the Topic DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05-CYBERACADEMY and DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05-SPECIAL-PROGEDU Actual Cost Grants:

- A. Personnel costs
 - A.1 Employees, A.2 Natural persons under direct contract, A.3 Seconded persons
 - A.4 SME owners and natural person beneficiaries
- 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 (for topics **DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05-CYBERACADEMY**)
 - D.2 Internally invoiced goods and services
- E. Indirect costs

Specific cost eligibility conditions for this call:

- personnel costs:

- average personnel costs (unit cost according to usual cost accounting practices): Yes
- SME owner/natural person unit cost⁴⁰: Yes
- travel and subsistence unit costs⁴¹: No (only actual costs)
- equipment costs:
 - depreciation + full cost for listed equipment (for topics **DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05-CYBERACADEMY** and **DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05-SPECIAL-PROGEDU**)

other cost categories:

- costs for financial support to third parties allowed for grants and prizes:
 - for topics **DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05-CYBERACADEMY**; maximum amount per third party EUR 60 000 unless a higher amount is required because the objective of the action would otherwise be impossible or overly difficult to achieve and this is duly justified in the Application Form. The **total amount** of financial support to third parties can be maximum 20% of the requested EU funding.
- internally invoiced goods and services (costs unit cost according to usual cost accounting practices): Yes
- indirect cost flat-rate: 7% of the eligible direct costs.
- VAT: non-deductible VAT is eligible (but please note that since 2013 VAT paid by beneficiaries that are public bodies acting as public authority is NOT eligible)
- other:
 - in-kind contributions for free are allowed, but cost-neutral, i.e. they cannot be declared as cost
 - kick-off meeting: costs for kick-off meeting organised by the granting authority are eligible (travel costs for maximum 2 persons, return ticket to Brussels and accommodation for one night) only if the meeting takes place after the project starting date set out in the Grant Agreement; the starting date can be changed through an amendment, if needed
 - project websites: communication costs for presenting the project on the participants' websites or social media accounts are eligible; costs for *separate* project websites are not eligible

for the Topic DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05-SPECIALISED-EDU Lump Sum Grants

-Lump sum contributions⁴²

⁴⁰ 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).

⁴¹ 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).

⁴² [Decision](#) of 31 March 2023 authorising the use of lump sum contributions under the Digital Europe Programme 2021-2027

Specific cost eligibility rules for the Lump Sum Grants:

- the lump sum amount must be calculated in accordance with the methodology set out in the lump sum decision and using the detailed budget table/calculator provided.
- the lump sum calculation should respect the following conditions:
 - for lump sums based on estimated project budgets: the estimated budget must comply with the basic eligibility conditions for EU actual cost grants (see [AGA – Annotated Grant Agreement, art 6](#))
 - for lump sums based on estimated project budgets: costs for financial support to third parties can be included in the detailed budget table for grants and prizes.
 - for Lump sum topic: maximum amount per third party EUR 60 000 unless a higher amount is required because the objective of the action would otherwise be impossible or overly difficult to achieve and this is duly justified in the Application Form. The **total amount** of financial support to third parties can be maximum 20% of the requested EU funding.

Reporting and payment arrangements

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

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

There will be one or more **interim payments** (with cost reporting through the use of resources report).

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 note that you are responsible for keeping records on all the work done and the costs declared except for the lump sum topic.

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

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

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

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

Security rules: *see Model Grant Agreement (art 13 and Annex 5)*

Ethics rules: *see Model Grant Agreement (art 14 and Annex 5)*

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

- background and list of background: Yes
- protection of results: Yes
- exploitation of results: Yes
- rights of use on results: Yes
- access to results for policy purposes: Yes

- access rights for the granting authority to results in case of a public emergency: 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
- dissemination of results: Yes
- additional communication activities: Yes
- special logo: No

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

- specific rules for PAC Grants for Procurement: No
- specific rules for Grants for Financial Support: No
- specific rules for blending operations: No

Other specificities

n/a

Non-compliance and breach of contract

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



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

11. How to submit an application

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

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

a) create a user account and register your organisation

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

Once you have an 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](#)
- [FAQs 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 contact: [Here](#)

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

13. Important



IMPORTANT

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

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

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

- **Balanced project budget** — Grant applications must ensure a balanced project budget and sufficient other resources to implement the project successfully (*e.g. own contributions, income generated by the action, financial contributions from third parties, etc*). You may be requested to lower your estimated costs, if they are ineligible (including excessive).
- **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 double funding** — There is a strict prohibition of double funding from the EU budget (except under EU Synergies actions). Outside such Synergies actions, any given action may receive only ONE grant from the EU budget and cost items may under NO circumstances declared to two different EU actions.
- **Completed/ongoing projects** — Proposals for projects that have already been completed will be rejected; proposals for projects that have already started will be assessed on a case-by-case basis (in this case, no costs can be reimbursed for activities that took place before the project starting date/proposal submission).
- **Combination with EU operating grants** — 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 Model Grant Agreement, art 6.2.E](#)).
- **Multiple proposals** — Applicants may submit more than one proposal for *different* projects under the same call (and be awarded a funding for them).
Organisations may participate in several proposals.
BUT: if there are several proposals for *very similar* projects, only one application will be accepted and evaluated; the applicants will be asked to withdraw one of them (or it will be rejected).
- **Resubmission** — Proposals may be changed and re-submitted until the deadline for submission.
- **Rejection** — By submitting the application, all applicants accept the call conditions set out in this 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](#).

Annex 1

Digital Europe types of action

The Digital Europe Programme uses the following actions to implement grants:

Simple Grants

Description: Simple Grants (SIMPLE) are a flexible type of action used by a large variety of topics and can cover most activities. The consortium will mostly use personnel costs to implement action tasks, activities with third parties (subcontracting, financial support, purchase) are possible but should be limited.

Funding rate: 50%

Payment model: Prefinancing – (x) interim payment(s) – final payment

SME Support Actions

Description: SME Support Actions (SME) are a type of action primarily consisting of activities directly aiming to support SMEs involved in building up and the deployment of the digital capacities. This type of action can also be used if SMEs need to be in the consortium and make investments to access the digital capacities.

Funding rate: 50% except for SMEs where a rate of 75% applies

Payment model: Prefinancing – (x) interim payment(s) – final payment

Coordination and Support Actions (CSAs)

Description: Coordination and Support Actions (CSAs) are a small type of action (a typical amount of 1-2 Mio) with the primary goal to support EU policies. Activities can include coordination between different actors for accompanying measures such as standardisation, dissemination, awareness-raising and communication, networking, coordination or support services, policy dialogues and mutual learning exercises and studies, including design studies for new infrastructure and may also include complementary activities of strategic planning, networking and coordination between programmes in different countries.

Funding rate: 100%

Payment model: Prefinancing – (x) interim payment(s) – final payment

Grants for Procurement

Description: Grants for Procurement (GP) are a special type of action where the main goal of the action (and thus the majority of the costs) consist of buying goods or services and/or subcontracting tasks. Contrary to the PAC Grants for Procurement (*see below*) there are no specific procurement rules (i.e. usual rules for purchase apply), nor is there a limit to 'contracting authorities/entities'. Personnel costs should be limited in this type of action; they are in general used to manage the grant, coordination between the beneficiaries, preparation of the procurements.

Funding rate: 50%

Payment model: Prefinancing - second prefinancing (to provide the necessary cash-flow to finance the procurements) – payment of the balance

PAC Grants for Procurement

Description: PAC Grants for Procurement (PACGP) are a specific type of action for procurement in grant agreements by 'contracting authorities/entities' as defined in the EU Public Procurement Directives (Directives 2014/24/EU, 2014/25/EU and 2009/81/EC) aiming at innovative digital goods and services (i.e. novel technologies on the way to commercialisation but not yet broadly available).

Funding rate: 50%

Payment model: Prefinancing - second prefinancing (to provide the necessary cash-flow to finance the procurements) – payment of the balance

Grants for Financial Support

Description: Grants for Financial Support (GfS) have a particular focus on cascading grants. The majority of the grant will be distributed via financial support to third parties with special provisions in the grant agreement, maximum amounts to third parties, multiple pre-financing and reporting obligations.

Annex 5 of the model grant agreements foresees specific rules for this type of action regarding conflict of interest, the principles of transparency, non-discrimination and sound financial management as well as the selection procedure and criteria.

In order to assure the co-financing obligation in the programme, the support to third parties should only cover 50% of third party costs.

Funding rate: 100% for the consortium, co-financing of 50% by the supported third party

Payment model: Prefinancing - second prefinancing (to provide the necessary cash-flow to finance sub-grants) – payment of the balance

Lump Sum Grants

Description: Lump Sum Grants (LS) reimburse a general lump sum for the entire project and the consortium as a whole. The lump sum is fixed ex-ante (at the latest at grant signature), on the basis of a methodology defined by the granting authority (either on the basis of a detailed project budget or other pre-defined parameters). The lump sum will cover all the beneficiaries' direct and indirect costs for the project. The beneficiaries do not need to report actual costs, they just need to claim the lump sum once the work is done. If the action is not properly implemented, only part of the lump sum will be paid.

Funding rate: 100%/50%/50% and 75% (for SMEs)

Payment model: Prefinancing – (x) interim payment(s)– final payment

Framework Partnerships (FPAs) and Specific Grants (SGAs)

FPAs

Description: FPAs establish a long-term cooperation mechanism between the granting authority and the beneficiaries of grants. The FPA specifies the common objectives (action plan) and the procedure for awarding specific grants. The specific grants are awarded via identified beneficiary actions (with or without competition).

Funding rate: no funding for FPA

SGAs

Description: The SGAs are linked to an FPA and implement the action plan (or part of it). They are awarded via an invitation to submit a proposal (identified beneficiary action). The consortium composition should in principle match (meaning that only entities that are part of the FPA can participate in an SGA), but otherwise the implementation is rather flexible. FPAs and SGAs can have different coordinators; other partners of the FPA are free to participate in an SGA or not. There is no limit to the amount of SGAs signed under one FPA.

Funding rate: 50%

Payment model: Prefinancing – (x) interim payment(s) – final payment

Annex 2

Eligibility restrictions under Articles 12(5) and (6) and 18(4) of the Digital Europe Regulation

Security restrictions Article 12(5) and (6)

If indicated in the Digital Europe Work Programme, and if justified for security reasons, topics can exclude the participation of legal entities *established* in a third country or DEP associated country, or established in the EU territory but *controlled* by a third country or third country legal entities (including DEP associated countries)⁴³.

This restriction is applicable for SO1 (High Performance Computing), SO2 (Artificial Intelligence) and SO3 (Cybersecurity), but at different levels.

- In the case of SO3, the provision is implemented in the strictest way. When activated, only entities established in the EU and controlled from the EU will be able to participate; entities from associated countries (which are normally eligible) can NOT participate – unless otherwise provided in the Work Programme.
- In SO1 and SO2, entities established in associated countries and entities controlled from non-EU countries may participate, if they comply with the conditions set out in the Work Programme (usually:
 - for the associated countries: be formally associated to Digital Europe Programme and receive a positive assessment by the Commission on the replies to their associated country security questionnaire.
 - for the participants: submission of a guarantee demonstrating that they have taken measures to ensure that their participation does not contravene security or EU strategic autonomy interests).



EEA countries (and participants from EEA countries) are exempted from these restrictions (and additional requirements) because EEA countries benefit from a status equivalent to the Member States.

In order to determine the ownership and control status, participants⁴⁴ will be required to fill in and submit a [declaration on ownership and control](#) as part of the proposal (and later on be requested to submit supporting documents) (see [Guidance on participation in DEP, HE, EDF and CEF-DIG restricted calls](#)).

⁴³ See Article 12(5) and (6) of the Digital Europe Regulation 2021/694.

⁴⁴ All types of participants except for entities that are validated as public bodies by the Central Validation Service.

In addition, where a guarantee is required, the participants will also have to fill in the [guarantee template](#), approved by the competent authorities of their country of establishment, and submit it to the granting authority which will assess its validity.

The activation of these restrictions will also make a number of specific provisions in the Grant Agreement applicable, such as country restrictions for eligible costs, country restrictions for subcontracting, and special rules for implementation, exploitation of results and transfers and exclusive licensing of results.

Thus:

- participation in any capacity (as beneficiary, affiliated entity, associated partner, subcontractor or recipient of financial support to third parties) is also limited to entities established in and controlled from eligible countries
- project activities (included subcontracted work) must take place in eligible countries
- the Grant Agreement provides for specific IPR restrictions.

Strategic autonomy restrictions Article 18(4)

If indicated in the Digital Europe Work Programme, calls can limit the participation to entities *established* in the EU, and/or entities established in third countries associated to the programme for EU strategic autonomy reasons⁴⁵.

The application of this article will make a number of specific provisions in the Grant Agreement applicable, such as country restrictions for eligible costs, country restrictions for subcontracting, and special rules for implementation, exploitation of results and transfers and exclusive licensing of results.

 For more information, see [Guidance on participation in DEP, HE, EDF and CEF-DIG restricted calls](#).

⁴⁵ See Article 18(4) of the Digital Europe Regulation [2021/694](#).