



Digital Europe Programme (DIGITAL)

Call for proposals

Advanced Digital Skills
(DIGITAL-2021-SKILLS-01)

Version 1.0
17 November 2021



HISTORY OF CHANGES			
Version	Publication Date	Change	Page
1.0	17.11.2021	▪ Initial version (new MFF).	
		▪	
		▪	
		▪	



**EUROPEAN HEALTH AND DIGITAL EXECUTIVE AGENCY
(HaDEA)**

HADEA. B - Digital, Industry and Space
HaDEA.B.2.01 - Digital Europe

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 2021/2022 Work Programme² and will be managed by the **European Health and Digital Executive Agency (HaDEA)** ('Agency').

The call covers the following **topics**:

- **DIGITAL-2021-SKILLS-01-SPECIALISED** - Specialised education programmes in key capacity areas
- **DIGITAL-2021-SKILLS-01-ANALYSIS** - Advanced digital skills analysis

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

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, activities that can be funded and the expected results (sections 1 and 2)
 - timetable and available budget (sections 3 and 4)
 - admissibility and eligibility conditions (including mandatory documents; sections 5 and 6)
 - criteria for financial and operational capacity and exclusion (section 7)
 - evaluation and award procedure (section 8)
 - award criteria (section 9)
 - legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements (section 10)
 - how to submit an application (section 11)
- the [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/2021/7914 of 10.11.2021 concerning the adoption of the multiannual work programme for 2021 - 2022 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.

Resilient, secure and trustworthy infrastructures and technologies are indispensable to ensure the respect of European rules and value. At the same time, in order to be able to develop, deploy and use these technologies, the EU needs digitally empowered citizens, a competent workforce and way more digital experts than today. This should be fostered by the development of a high-performing digital education ecosystem, as well as by an effective policy to promote links with and attract talent from all over the globe.

For this reason, digital skills and education represent one of the four main trajectories to achieve a successful Digital Decade. To monitor EU's digital ambitions in this domain until 2030, the Commission has proposed a Digital Compass that sets, among others, the target of having 20 million employed ICT specialists in the EU. Actions in the Advanced Digital Skills pillar of the Digital Europe Programme aim at contributing to the attainment of the ambitious target set by the Digital Decade, in synergy with the actions put in place by Member States, also in the context of their Recovery and Resilience Plans.

The actions under Strategic Objective 4 aim at supporting the excellence of EU education and training institutions in digital areas, including by encouraging their cooperation with research and businesses. In the same way as the EU joins forces to invest in digital infrastructure, through the EuroHPC, or the European Alliance for Industrial Data and Clouds, it needs to build on the strength of its best education and training institutions to improve the related specialised education offer needed to become world-leader. The goal is to improve the capacity to nurture and attract digital talents, whilst fostering an ecosystem that will help drive innovation and digital breakthroughs. In particular, this will be achieved through the development of excellent education and training partnerships, gathering academia, vocational education and training providers, research, competence centres and innovative businesses.

³ <https://digital-skills-jobs.europa.eu/en/latest/news/new-master-courses-artificial-intelligence-ai>

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

DIGITAL-2021-SKILLS-01-SPECIALISED - Specialised education programmes in key capacity areas

Objectives

The objective of this call is to support excellence in higher education institutions, making them world leaders in training for digital specialists and increase capacity of the training offer for advanced technologies. This should also lead to the development of dynamic digital ecosystems where academic excellence, research and innovative industries work together to attract and retain the best talents worldwide. To this end, it is necessary that education and training institutions and partner organisations, building on their strengths, raise their level of ambition by attracting top teaching staff, acquiring world-class equipment, establishing fluid interaction and mobility between academia and business. This should lead to a boost in excellence and intensity of the knowledge triangle. At the same time, this call is expected to contribute to the overall objective of the Programme.

Scope

Proposals under this action must address the design and delivery of higher education programme(s) (at ISCED LEVEL 7 - hereafter programmes) of 60, 90 or 120 ECTS credits such as:

1. Interdisciplinary programmes, including the teaching of the above areas in a non-ICT education field (e.g. AI applications for agriculture or cybersecurity in health sector, data and law etc..) ⁴
2. Conversion programmes for students graduated in non-ICT fields to access specialised Master's programmes in the areas listed at point 3, below.
3. Or a Master's programme in one or a combination of the following areas:
 - a) Artificial intelligence ⁵
 - b) Cybersecurity ⁶
 - c) Quantum ⁷
 - d) Blockchain
 - e) Data
 - f) Cloud computing,
 - g) Photonics
 - h) Robotics

⁴ Programmes can also target more than one technology areas identified.

⁵ For proposals in artificial intelligence, synergies and complementarities with the existing networks of excellence ([Horizon2020 EU ICT 48](#)) and [CEF 2020-1 Digital Skills and Jobs Platform](#) need to be taken into account.

⁶ 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. The Commission particularly encourages new programmes containing courses on:

- Organisational Security (Security Operations and Personal Security);
- System Retirement (including cybersecurity risks in the transfer of old to new IT systems);
- Societal Security (cybersecurity angle of Customer Service and Technical Support);
- Component Security (Component Procurement);
- Connection Security (Physical Interface and Connectors).

⁷ For proposals in quantum it is encouraged to make reference to the competence framework on quantum technologies.

i) Internet of Things

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 technology.

Each consortium should train at least 150 students per year, in line with ambition to boost significantly the number of digital experts. Preference will be given to consortia that have high ambitions also in terms of the number of students trained and successfully completing the programmes.

Proposals can request a contribution of up to EUR 10 million, with a duration of up to 4 years, with a standard co-financing rate of 50%. Consequently, this does not preclude submission and selection of proposals with different duration or for other amounts.

The proposed project must fulfil the following objectives:

- Provide students with the necessary theoretical and practical skills and knowledge to contribute to the design, deployment and use of the current and future generation digital technologies mentioned above.
- Train professionals to boost the adoption and the further development of these digital technologies by industry in different strategic domains.
- Establish structural and sustainable partnerships between the members of the consortium, so as to facilitate sharing of resources, know-how and staff and encourage cooperation also beyond education purposes, for example on research or dissemination activities.
- Increase the offer of quality education both online and in-presence in key digital areas. All the proposals must address all of the following aspects:

Partnerships and structure of the programme

- Outline the framework of the education programme(s) and the learning outcomes, and detail how excellence in academic content, teaching and talent development will be achieved.
- Explain how the programme(s) will be structured, including research activities, training on the job, challenged-based projects and leave flexibility to students to pursue their specific interests.
- Ensure a modular design of the curricula, with clear identification of scientific disciplines, industrial applications and soft skills, relevant to the subject(s) addressed.
- Describe the details of the awarded degree(s) (e.g. individual, double or joint degree).
- Define the roles of all the members of the consortium (e.g. higher education institutions, excellence/research centres in digital technologies, businesses and other relevant stakeholders) and explain what will be their contribution in the design and delivery of the programme(s).
- Expectations and commitment of possible industry partners (non-SMEs) in mentorship programmes should be described in detail and the added value clearly identified.

- Explain how the programme(s) are designed in order to take into consideration all relevant new developments and trends regarding new technological developments and responsiveness to labour market needs (current and future).
- Demonstrate how the needs of SMEs and start-ups will be taken into account in the education programme(s).
- Explain how the partnerships will be sustainable over time and show a high degree of integration.
- Clearly elaborate the benefits of the jointly designed programme for students and stakeholders and how it will ensure excellence to attract talents and partners from the public and private sector.
- Explain how students will be educated in line with the EU values and ethics throughout the curriculum
- Develop an online version of modules/courses forming part of the education programme on the selected emerging technologies and targeting a wider audience than the students enrolled to the full programme. This online module shall be made accessible for free in, at least, 3 EU languages and hosted, in an interoperable manner in the Digital Skills and Jobs Platform.
- Explain how the programme(s) would be adapted in case of distant learning requirements and how it will be ensured that all the outcomes and deliverables (cf. below) would still be achieved.
- Explain the added value of the designed education programme(s) compared to the existing education offer delivered in the latest academic years prior to the delivery of the new education programme(s)⁸

Infrastructure and facilities

- Explain how the education programme(s) will ensure access to technical equipment, laboratories, platforms or other digital tools and testing facilities that are necessary to ensure the attainment of the learning outcomes.
- Explain if and how technical equipment will be purchased/leased or with which technical equipment the facilities will be upgraded to ensure the course has the necessary facilities to deliver excellence.
- Explore innovative ways to use technology in teaching and learning;
- Explain how this material and technical equipment and the innovative approaches will be instrumental to the delivery of the education programme(s)

Teaching staff

- Explain how the education programme(s) will offer lectures and seminars by renowned experts in digital technologies, both from the public and private sector
- Consider incentives to attract renowned teaching and research staff to contribute to the delivery of the programme

⁸ Education institutions that already have an education programme(s) in place in the area addressed by the action can be part of the consortium but they will need to demonstrate how their offer has improved thanks to their participation in the consortium.

- Consider actions to encourage the mobility of the teaching staff across the institutions part of the consortia in particular between the business representatives and academia.

Students

- Ensure that at least 150 EU students are trained each year across the consortium.
- Explain how EU and associated countries students will be financially supported (e.g. via scholarships or fee waivers or others) in order to allow everyone to have access to high-quality education in digital areas. This support should also aim to promote diversity in terms of gender, age, social and economic background etc. This support can take the form of financial support to third parties up to 20% of the total budget.
- Design mechanism for student mobility between European universities, research centres and industry should be designed as a part of the study programme in synergy and coordination with other mobility programmes (Erasmus+ etc.) to support awareness and collaboration across communities.

Outreach

- Encourage the inclusion of relevant organisations in the consortium across Europe, particularly in countries where advanced digital skills levels are low, according to the Digital Economy and Society Index⁹.
- Explain how the programme will promote diversity among its participants, in terms of both consortium composition and students.
- Organize events for general public on specific topics related to the subject of the programme implemented.
- Publish information about the new education programme(s) on online platforms that provide information on the available education offer, with provision of programmes' details (e.g. name, description, list of courses, length, field of study in which the course is taught...) and institution details (e.g. name of the university, country)¹⁰.

Outcomes and deliverables

Proposals selected for funding will be required to demonstrate by the end of the Action:

- The education programme(s) are offered and taught to students in all higher institutions participating in the action;
- Support (financial or other) has been provided to students in order to take part to the education programme(s)
- Structural partnerships have been established among the members of the consortium (for example, through number of seminars held by SMEs representatives, number of hours taught, etc.);

⁹ <https://digital-agenda-data.eu/datasets/desi/visualizations>

¹⁰ For example: StudyPortals's [bachelorsportal.com](https://www.bachelorsportal.com), [mastersportal.com](https://www.mastersportal.com) and [shortcoursesportal.com](https://www.shortcoursesportal.com), FindAUniversity, Keystone Academic Solutions's [bachelorstudies.com](https://www.bachelorstudies.com), [masterstudies.com](https://www.masterstudies.com), [academiccourses.com](https://www.academiccourses.com), IDP connect, Educations Media Group (EMG), Times Higher Education World University Rankings (THE), EducationDynamics.

- The availability of modules forming part of the Master programme or courses related to the Master programme in at least 3 EU languages on the Digital Skills and Jobs Core Service Platform.

KPIs to measure outcomes and deliverables

Students

- Number of higher education institutions offering the new programme(s);
- Number of applications to the education programme(s) (gender, age, educational background, country of origin);
- Number of students enrolled to the education programme(s) (gender, age, educational background, country of origin);
- Number of students who have successfully completed the education programme(s) in the time foreseen by the action (gender/age/educational background, country of origin):
 - Number of people who received a degree after the successful completion of the full education programme
 - Number of people who received a certification after the successful completion of the full online course
- Number of students benefitting from the support (financial or other) from the education institutions

Partnership and universities

- Hours of hands-on training, making use of the equipment purchased/leased within the framework of this action.
- Number of collaborations with industry:
 - Number of seminars/lectures held by industry experts (member/ non-member of the consortia)
 - Number of cooperation agreements signed with industry partners, involving sharing of technical equipment and/or facilities
- Number of job-placements/internships carried out by the students
 - in the organisation member of the consortium
 - in an external organisation
- Increase in (2021-2024):
 - international to domestic staff ratio
 - the proportion of research that involves international collaboration.

Targeted stakeholders

The consortium should demonstrate a good mix of excellence in education and research in digital technologies and applications, with solid links to the digital industry in Europe. Moreover, the participating organisations should demonstrate complementary roles in the programme and an outstanding track record in their respective field.

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 that lag behind;

- Inclusion of affiliated entities from public and private research and industry, in particular start-ups, but also other public or private bodies that can be instrumental for the delivery of the actions requested by the call;
- Close collaboration with other stakeholders that provide technical expertise and experimentation and testing facilities (e.g. with European Digital Innovation Hubs) is highly encouraged;
- University Alliances already awarded by Erasmus are encouraged to apply, together with the partners necessary to meet the requirements for consortium composition outlined in this section.

The consortium should include a research and excellence centre and demonstrates in the proposal the relevance of this centre by referring to the points below such as but not limited to:

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

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, 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-2021-SKILLS-01-ANALYSIS - Advanced digital skills analysis

Objectives

This action will support the roll out of initiatives for advanced digital skills development, by gathering inputs on the existing education offers in digital areas and

the related needs of the labour market. It will deliver an analysis of the labour market needs and recommend priority areas for investment and give indications on the most appropriate delivery modes for training. This should contribute to support excellence in education institutions, the development of a dynamic digital ecosystems and the collaboration between the different consortia established within the call "DIGITAL-2021-SKILLS-01-SPECIALISED". This support should be provided by organisations having expertise in the field of specialised education, research and labour market.

Scope

The proposed project must:

- Provide information and data in order to improve the conceptualisation and deployment of their specialised education programme(s). This should address in particular the following aspects:
 1. On the basis of existing literature and mapping exercises¹¹ and building on the expertise of the applicant(s), collect information on the skills needs in the areas targeted by the call DIGITAL-2021-SKILLS-01-SPECIALISED. This should give a general overview of how needs are evolving and detect the main trends in emerging skills needs per each technology areas.
 2. At the same time, the analysis should provide insights on the needs for advanced digital skills in specific sectors, taking into account also the implications on the education offer (e.g. demand for more multi-disciplinary courses, integration of ICT modules in certain faculties etc.)
 3. Provide insights on how education programme(s) can be best designed to:
 - Increase excellence of the learning content;
 - Increase cooperation among the partners of the consortium;
 - Increase attractiveness for students;
 - Help retain and attract highly skilled teaching staff;
 - Ensure that the learning content is additional to the offer of similar specialised courses available in the market and in line with the demand of the labour market.
 4. Provide an analysis of the Actions funded under DIGITAL-2021-SKILLS-01-SPECIALISED by end of 2022, focusing for example on the areas that have been addressed, the cooperation agreements put forward among the members of the different consortia, main elements of each proposal. These insights will be used to draft future calls in the same domain.
 5. Foster the coordination between the different consortia of DIGITAL-2021-SKILLS-01-SPECIALISED (e.g. create database with name, contact details and area of expertise of experts from different consortia in order to facilitate their exchange and collaboration; organise

¹¹ For example studies conducted by the different Public, Private Partnerships in the different areas, OECD and JRC reports, consulting firms analysis.

meetings and structures to facilitate exchange between the different consortia).

6. Provide insights on what actions could be implemented to create an ecosystem between education institutions and companies (especially SMEs).
7. Supporting actions to increase mobility between companies and universities.
8. Support actions to increase the awareness for the Master programmes of DIGITAL-2021-SKILLS-01-SPECIALISED call and the related actions.
9. Conduct a survey with the consortia of DIGITAL-2021-SKILLS-01-SPECIALISED call in order to find out which additional support requests the consortia would need most. Deploy and carry out the most relevant ones.
10. Conduct an analysis of the possible impact of the DIGITAL-2021-SKILLS-01-SPECIALISED results.

Outcomes and deliverables

The proposal selected for funded will be required to demonstrate (by the end of the action unless otherwise indicated):

- That the analysis on the skills needs, sectoral needs and options to improve the delivery of the education programme(s) has been carried out and shared with the Commission services.
- The completion of the evaluation of the awarded proposals under DIGITAL-2021-SKILLS-01-SPECIALISED call, highlighting good examples and formulating suggestions on how to further encourage the development of excellent education programme(s) in digital areas.
- That support has been provided for the coordination of the different consortia and their members awarded in the context of DIGITAL-2021-SKILLS-01-SPECIALISED call, with a view of maximising exchanges and scaling up successful activities.
- The promotion and dissemination activities related to the new learning opportunities available as a result of DIGITAL-2021-SKILLS-01-SPECIALISED have been carried out.

KPIs to measure 'Outcomes and deliverable

- Number of studies on the skills analysis.
- Number of recommendations provided on how best support specialised learning opportunities in digital areas.
- Number of promotion and dissemination activities carried out.

Targeted stakeholders

The applicant should demonstrate a good expertise in the design and deployment of studies and evaluation actions related to advanced digital technologies, as well as supporting and coordination actions for ecosystems and networks in this field. Moreover, the applicant should demonstrate knowledge and expertise in terms of the

state of play and needs of education institutions and companies (especially SMEs) related to the research, development and application of advanced digital technologies.

The following applicants are encouraged to apply

- Excellence centres;
- Research institutes;
- Other bodies that can deliver the actions requested by the call.

Type of action

Coordination and Support Actions – 100% funding rate.



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

Specific topic conditions

- For this topic, following reimbursement for equipment costs applies: depreciation cost only.
- 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 72 000 000**. This budget might be increased by maximum 20%.

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

Topic	Topic budget
1 – DIGITAL-2021-SKILLS-01-SPECIALISED	EUR 70 000 000
2 – DIGITAL-2021-SKILLS-01-ANALYSIS	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:	17 November 2021
<u>Deadline for submission:</u>	22 February 2022 – 17:00:00 CET (Brussels)
Evaluation:	14 March to 29 April 2022
Information on evaluation results:	End of May 2022
GA signature:	September 2022

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*):
 - detailed budget table: not applicable
 - CVs of core project team: not applicable
 - activity reports of last year: not applicable
 - **list of previous projects: applicable**
 - **security issues table: applicable**
 - ethics issues table: not 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** except for **Coordination and Support Actions** which are limited to maximum **50 pages** (Part B). Evaluators will not consider any additional pages.

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

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

6. Eligibility

Eligible participants (eligible countries)

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

- be legal entities (public or private bodies)
- be established in one of the eligible countries, i.e.:
 - EU Member States (including overseas countries and territories (OCTs))
 - non-EU countries:
 - listed EEA countries and countries associated to the Digital Europe Programme ([associated countries](#)^[OBJ]) 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 persons¹².

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

¹² See Article 197(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

Associations and interest groupings — Entities composed of members may participate as 'sole beneficiaries' or 'beneficiaries without legal personality'¹³. ⚠️ 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 if the negotiations are concluded before grant signature (with retroactive effect, if provided in the agreement).

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)*¹⁴ and entities covered by Commission Guidelines No [2013/C 205/05](#)¹⁵). 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-2021-SKILLS-01-SPECIALISED:

- a consortium of at least 6 applicants (beneficiaries; not affiliated entities) and which complies with the following conditions:
 - At least three degree-awarding education institutions¹⁶ from three different eligible countries participating in DIGITAL programme ¹⁷;
 - At least two SMEs;
 - At least one research centres or excellence centre¹⁸ in one key emerging technology in line with the definition in Targeted Stakeholders section;
 - The coordinator of the consortia must be one of the participating education institutions.

Specific requirements for consortium composition are included in section 2 of this document under 'Specific topic conditions'.

Eligible activities

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

¹³ For the definitions, see Articles 187(2) and 197(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

¹⁴ 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](#).

¹⁵ 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).

¹⁶ Need to be part of the Erasmus Charter for higher education

¹⁷ Consortia awarded in the context of European University Alliances are encouraged to apply, provided that all the consortium requirements are respected and therefore including the additional partners required for the eligibility of this call.

¹⁸ For example as defined in the calls [Horizon2020 EU ICT 48](#) and [CEF 2020-1 Digital Skills and Jobs Platform](#) need to be explained.

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-2021-SKILLS-01-SPECIALISED for grants 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](#)¹⁹ and its implementing rules and/or national rules) provide for instance that:

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

¹⁹ 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).

- 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 participate²⁰:

- 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 misconduct²¹ (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)

²⁰ See Articles 136 and 141 of EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

²¹ Professional misconduct includes: violation of ethical standards of the profession, wrongful conduct with impact on professional credibility, false declarations/misrepresentation of information,

- 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 that²²:

- 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 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


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.

²² See Article 141 EU Financial Regulation [2018/1046](#).

'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:

- between 12 and 48 months for topic DIGITAL-2021-SKILLS-01-SPECIALISED

- between 12 and 18 months for topic DIGITAL-2021-SKILLS-01-ANALYSIS

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):

- EUR 10 000 000 per project for topic DIGITAL-2021-SKILLS-01-SPECIALISED
- EUR 2 000 000 per project for topic DIGITAL-2021-SKILLS-01-ANALYSIS

The grant awarded may be lower than the amount requested.

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*).

Budget categories for this call:

- A. Personnel costs
 - A.1 Employees, A.2 Natural persons under direct contract, A.3 Seconded persons
 - A.4 SME owners and natural person beneficiaries
- B. Subcontracting costs
- C. Purchase costs
 - C.1 Travel and subsistence
 - C.2 Equipment

- C.3 Other goods, works and services
- D. Other cost categories
 - D.1 Financial support to third parties for topic DIGITAL-2021-SKILLS-01-SPECIALISED - Specialised education programmes in key capacity areas
 - 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 cost²³: Yes
- travel and subsistence unit costs²⁴: No (only actual costs)
- equipment costs:
 - depreciation only for topic DIGITAL-2021-SKILLS-01-ANALYSIS
 - depreciation + full cost for listed equipment for topic DIGITAL-2021-SKILLS-01-SPECIALISED
- other cost categories:
 - costs for financial support to third parties allowed for grants:
 - for topic DIGITAL-2021-SKILLS-01-SPECIALISED: maximum amount per third party EUR 60 000 and maximum of the 20% of the requested Grant amount , 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.
 - 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

²³ 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)7715).

²⁴ 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).

- 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

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.

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

b) submit the proposal

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

Submit your proposal in 3 parts, as follows:

- Part A includes administrative information about the applicant organisations (future coordinator, beneficiaries, affiliated entities and associated partners) and the summarised budget for the proposal. Fill it in directly online
- Part B (description of the action) covers the technical content of the proposal. Download the mandatory word template from the Submission System, fill it in and upload it as a PDF file
- Annexes (*see section 5*). Upload them as PDF 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 should be sent to the following email address: HADEA-DEP-DIGITAL-CALLS@ec.europa.eu

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

13. Important



IMPORTANT

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

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

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

- **Balanced project budget** — Grant applications must ensure a balanced project budget and sufficient other resources to implement the project successfully (*e.g. own contributions, income generated by the action, financial contributions from third parties, etc*). You may be requested to lower your estimated costs, if they are ineligible (including excessive).
- **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 will use the following actions to implement grants:

Simple Grants

Description: The Simple Grants 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: 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: 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: Type of action for which 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: 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: Type of action with 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

Framework Partnerships (FPAs) and Specific Grants (SGAs)

FPAs

Description: An FPA establishes 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 coordinator of the FPA has to be the coordinator of each SGA signed under the FPA and will always take to role of single contact point for the granting authority. All the other partners of the FPA can participate in any SGA. 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

Lump Sum Grant

Description: Lump Sum Grants 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). The granting authority defines a methodology for calculating the amount of the lump sum. There is an overall amount, i.e. the lump sum will cover the beneficiaries' direct and indirect eligible costs. 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: 50%

Payment model: Prefinancing – second (third) prefinancing (as there is no cost reporting) – 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 associated country, or established in the EU territory but *controlled* by a third country or third country legal entities (including associated countries)²⁵.

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 EU MS or EU legal entities will be able to participate — with no exceptions.
- In SO1 and SO2, entities controlled by third countries or third country legal entities may be able to participate if they comply with certain conditions set up in the Work Programme. To that end, additional rules will be imposed on those legal entities, which need to be followed if they want to participate.

The activation 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.

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 reasons²⁶.

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 the *Guidance on ownership control restrictions in EU grants*.

²⁵ See Article 12(5) and (6) of the Digital Europe Regulation 2021/694

²⁶ See Article 18(4) of the Digital Europe Regulation 2021/694.