civitta

EU Funding Unlocked: A Comprehensive Playbook for Growing Innovative SMEs



This Playbook is part of the initiative # Growing with EU Funding



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Introduction

We believe that for the innovative SMEs to develop their ideas into successful products and innovative services, **EU funding is essential**.

It can provide **money to invest** into:



research, development and creation of innovative products



buying necessary equipment and technologies



expanding the R&D teams and hire talents

Additionally, it can provide opportunities for:



internationalisation, access to new markets and business development across Europe



pilot testing of your products in cooperation with end users



testing innovative business and market strategies



successful references from pilots in one or several European countries

However, the funding world is very complex and it is easy to miss interesting opportunities.

To use EU funding efficiently means to be able to navigate this complex world of funding instruments, plan wisely and combine creatively.

And most importantly, to understand that EU funding is only effective when paired with a long-term strategy aligned with the growth strategy of your company.

This Playbook provides concrete ideas on how to fully exploit the potential of EU funding for your innovative business.

It reflects our long-term mission; to educate the companies, help them access the EU funding and achieve long-lasting impact.

Chapter A Blueprint for Growth:

Foundations for Success

This chapter will present you with the **principles** we believe are vital for an efficient use of EU funding that leads to transformative growth:

- * understanding your place in the 3D world of European funding;
- * taking the path towards the international added value;
- * harnessing the benefits of both local and international funding;
- * creating a Funding Strategy a concrete plan of your journey to international growth.

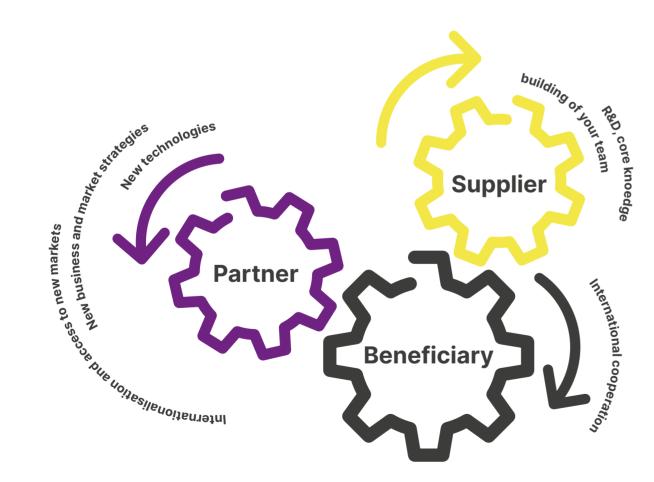


Your place in the 3D world of European funding

For an innovative SME, the EU funding world is three-dimensional. If you are offering an innovative technology or service, beside your obvious role of potential funding beneficiary, you may:

- * participate in EU funded projects in the position of a partner (in a project consortium).
- * supply your innovative product to an organisation that receives EU funding.

To help you navigate the different types of opportunities, in chapter C Navigating EU Funding Instruments: A Comprehensive Guide, we have indicated potential use of each funding instrument.



A path towards the international added value

Embarking on the journey of EU funding begins with seizing straightforward opportunities – often referred to as ,low-hanging fruits' – such as acquiring machinery and adopting innovative technologies. These initial steps provide a foundational advantage, enabling you to prepare for more ambitious ventures.

In parallel, ambitious SMEs engage in research and development efforts, essential for developing and applying new knowledge in innovative products. They encompass collaborative R&D efforts that not only refine existing products but also pilot new ones, thus paving the way for substantive growth and market differentiation. This involves collaborative research and development and testing of these innovations, enabling a significant value creation within the company.

The ultimate goal of this funding journey is to engage in complex, prestigious grants that support international cooperation in R&D, international deployment, and scaling of innovative technologies. Achieving this stage represents a pinnacle of success, creating unique added value at a European level and establishing the business as a key player on the international stage.



Low Hanging Fruits / Capex

- Purchase of machinery and equipment
- Adoption of innovative production technologies
- Digitalisation (Industry 4.0)
- Reducing energy intensity



R&D, Innovations

- New innovative products/processes
- Proposals for new or improved products/ processes
- Testing and product/ process validation
- Collaborative research
- Creation of own knowhow through collabortion



Internationalization

- Research, development and testing of internationally innovative products
- Creating international partnerships
- International business development

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Combining European-level and national-level funding

Efficient utilisation of EU funding necessitates a deep understanding of the distinct types of funding available: (1) European-level funding, managed directly by the European Commission and its agencies, and (2) national-level funding, overseen by Member States under a shared management approach with the European Commission.

European-level programs offer a centralised process governed by the Commission's Directorates-General or specialised agencies, with entities from all over the European union participating and competing. In contrast, national-level programs allow Member States to tailor funding priorities to local needs, approved and monitored by the EC, offering more specialised opportunities that align with local economic strategies.

The key to maximising the potential of EU funding lies in strategically combining these diverse instruments. Understanding the advantages and intricacies of both funding levels enables innovative SMEs to create a comprehensive funding strategy that leverages the unique benefits of each, ensuring a balanced approach to achieving growth and innovation across both local and international spectrums.

Programs directly managed by the EC



Life €5,4B



Horizon Europe €95B



Innovation Fund €10B



Digital Europe €7,5B



EDF €8B



EU4HEALTH €5,3B



Eurostars €1,2B

Programs directly managed by national authorities



Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP) €672.5B



Just Transition Fund (JTF) €10B



European Structural and Investment Funds €373B

Programs directly managed by the EC - European-level funding

CONS

- 1 Very competitive
- 2 "Closed club"
- 3 Thematic limitations
- 4 International impact required

PROS

- 1 Simple administration
- 2 Very prestigious
- 3 Focus on project excellence
- 4 Short time-frames

Programs managed by national authorities - National-level funding

CONS

- Bureacracy
- 2 Public procurement
- 3 Long time-frames
- 4 Local assessors
- 5 Not so much focus on excellence

PROS

- 1 Higher success rates
- 2 Building R&D Infrastructure
- 3 Building local relations
- 4 Fewer thematic limitations
- 5 Local impact required

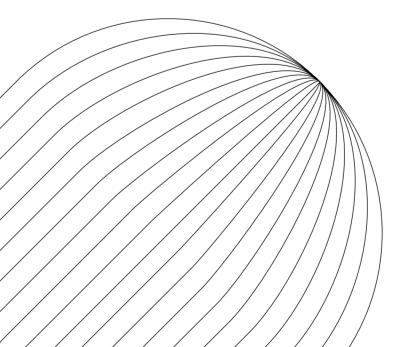
Funding Strategy - a plan for your journey to international growth

A Funding Strategy is a tailored map of both European-level and national-level funding opportunities – large and small – that align with the long-term development goals of your company. It acts as a strategic blueprint, highlighting paths that are most beneficial for growth.

The strategy should include:

- * a critical prioritisation, where opportunities are assessed based on their potential impact and relevance, ensuring that efforts are focused on the most promising opportunities;
- * a detailed Roadmap to transformative growth outlining concrete steps for progress through funding stages, planning systematically how to elevate the business from local to global scales through strategic investments;
- * a precise Timeplan that schedules the grant applications, ensuring timely preparation and submission.

This helps to minimise the risk of missing valuable funding opportunities, plan investments more efficiently, and ultimately, maximise the amount of funding secured.



Funding roadmap for an innovative SME

Example case study:

An innovative SME in Slovakia looking for support to develop Al-driven predictive tools for environmental data analysis.

Two strategic goals: 1) using AI for R&D; and 2) international growth.



PROGRAMME	EDIH	LIFE	PROGRAM SLOVAKIA	PROGRAM SLOVAKIA	INTERREG
	DESIGNING AND TESTING OF AI TECHNOLOGIES	PILOT VALIDATION OF REAL-TIME MODEL	NATIONAL ECOSYSTEM & PARTNERSHIP	SCALING UP OF REAL- TIME MODELS	INTERNATIONAL ECOSYSTEM & PARTNERSHIP
PLACE IN THE 3D WORLD OF FUNDING	AI MATURITY ASSESSMENT DESIGN OF AI METHODS TESTING AND EVALUATION OF AI METHODS	VALIDATING REAL-TIME MODEL IN VARIOUS COUNTRIES NATIONAL & INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT	BUILDING RELATIONS WITH LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS PREPARATION FOR NATIONAL TENDERS	CREATING COMPLEX SYSTEMS OF REAL-TIME MONITORING AND PREDICTION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL DATA COMPLEX WATER MANAGEMENT	USING COMPANY KNOW-HOW IN THE INTERNATIONAL AREA & DEVELOPMENT OF PARTNERSHIP INTERNATIONAL TRAINING ACTIVITIES
TYPE OF FUNDING	NATIONAL-LEVEL	EU-LEVEL	NATIONAL-LEVEL	NATIONAL-LEVEL	EU-LEVEL
PATH TOWARDS INTERNATIONAL ADDED VALUE	LOW-HANGING FRUITS	INTERNATIO- NALISATION	R&D	R&D	INTERNATIO- NALISATION

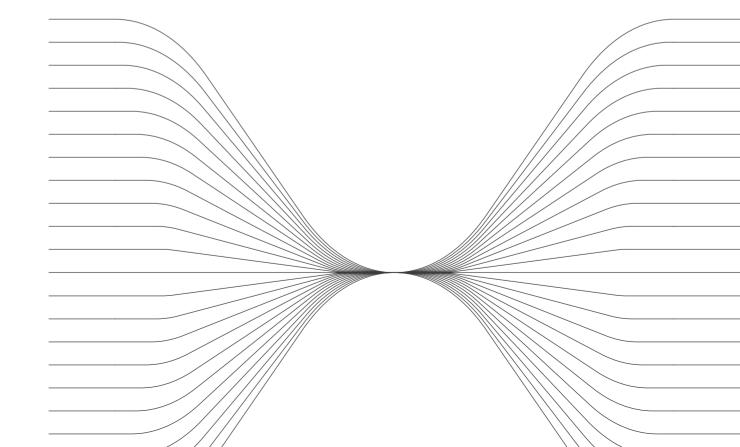
Chapter B Strategic Partnership:

Crafting Success with EU Funding

To embark on the EU funding journey described in the previous chapter, it is crucial to have a strategic consulting partner that will support you.

This chapter aims to:

- * illuminate the critical role of such strategic partnerships in maximising EU funding opportunities for innovative SMEs;
- * describe how we envision a long-term partnership and its foundations for success;
- * show real-world case studies that demonstrate the effectiveness of innovative, tailored strategies in unlocking complex funding opportunities and driving long-term growth across European markets.





Our vision of Advisory Partnership to craft success with EU funding

We sincerely believe that the role of a consultant supporting growing innovative SMEs extends far beyond the traditional task of merely "writing the project application". A true advisory partnership is founded on a commitment to facilitate growth within the client's organization, ensuring that every step in the funding application process not only targets successful funding acquisition but also enhances the SME strategic capabilities and innovative potential.

Such partnership should be funded in the following qualities:

- * Embracing creative problem-solving is essential in navigating the complex landscape of EU funding. Identifying and pursuing less obvious funding opportunities helps unlock funding potential and access diverse funding sources.
- Building and leveraging international networks to foster robust consortia across Europe is another crucial aspect of such partnerships. This extensive networking not only enhances the chances of funding success but also positions innovative SMEs at the forefront of European innovation, enabling them to participate in leading-edge developments within their fields.
- * Effective advisory involves engagement throughout the entire project lifecycle. From the initial drafting of funding strategy and preparing diverse applications to active participation in project implementation, comprehensive involvement ensures that each phase is executed with precision and aligned with the client's long-term business goals. This level of support transforms funding opportunities into tangible results, driving substantial growth and innovation.

Success story 1

Innovative company in landscape ecology, geography, and hydrology

Company name	ESPRIT
Location	Banská Štiavnica, Slovakia
Background	Innovative company in landscape ecology, geography, and hydrology
Long term goals	* harnessing AI for enhanced R&D* expanding internationally
Approach	Crafting a tailored funding strategy, following steps were identified:
	1. Testing AI technologies adoption
	This included securing AI consulting at SK-AI EDIH (European Digital Innovation Hub) to integrate digital innovation into the products.
	Supporting international pilot validation and business development
	The LIFE program has been identified to support the piloting and deployment. The project FLOPRES (www.flopres.eu) has been submitted and selected for funding in 2023. Within the project Esprit has been developing and deploying an innovative flood prevention model in pilot areas in Poland and Slovakia, cooperating with regional authorities in both countries and cultivating partnerships abroad. In parallel, through its NGO (Envirocentrum) ESPRIT became a Friend of the Climate Adaptation Mission, facilitating invaluable international partnerships and enhancing their credibility on the global stage.
	3. To ensure sustainability
	Local funding opportunities in Slovakia have been mapped to deploy Esprit solutions at national level and create complex water management solutions.
Results	This multi-faceted approach and comprehensive funding strategy enabled ESPRIT to achieve important steps in the long-term objectives of AI integration and international expansion through securing national- and European-level aid.

Success story 2 Innovative company in the chemical industry

Company name	confidential
Location	Estonia
Background	Innovative company in the chemical industry
Long term goals	# develop a novel technology for production of chemicals# establish a new production unit in Estonia
Approach	Our collaboration with an innovative company in the chemical industry has been a remarkable example of growing with our client.
	1. Develop a funding strategy
	We started working together on the company's strategic plans in 2019 and have been preparing funding projects according to our client's development roadmap ever since. The aim of our client has been to develop a novel technology for production of chemicals and establish a production unit in Estonia. We have been on a journey together with the company from the very first R&D works until the current stage of the demonstration plant.
	2. Secure local funding for R&D and internationalisation
	Within our collaboration the company has utilised local funding opportunities for R&D and demonstration activities. Through the long-term strategy we have been able to understand our client's business to the core and grasp the complexities to be able to be a solid partner.
	Further internationalisation and commercial-scale production
	The next step of our collaboration will be to support our client in leveraging international large-scale funding opportunities that support the construction of the commercial production unit. We have already mapped the potential funding possibilities that can be applied for once the demonstration has been completed.
Results	Through the funding obtained, the company has gained the capacity to involve international and high-level R&D organisations to their technology development enabling the company to take long leaps towards their strategic objectives. In five years, the company has grown from having initial plans of the technology to actual pilot production and is now at the threshold of commercial-scale production.

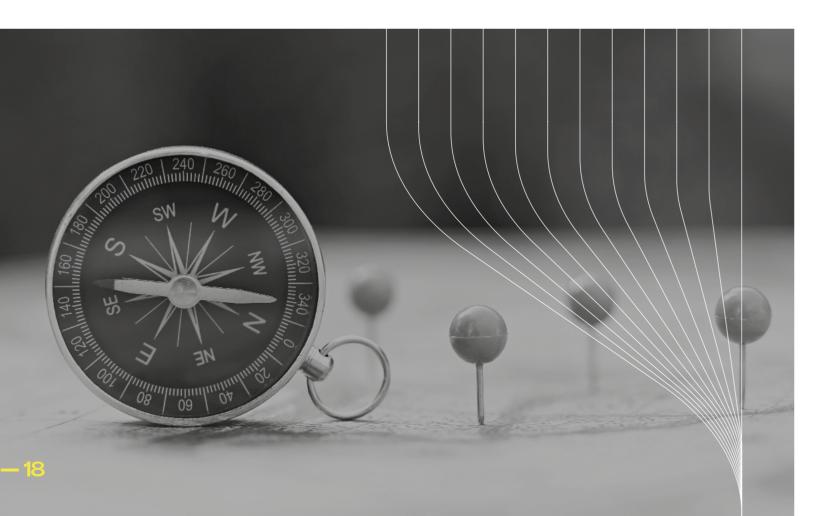
Chapter C Navigating EU Funding Instruments: A Comprehensive Guide

To navigate the complex world of funding instruments, plan wisely and combine creatively, it is crucial to have knowledge of the existing funding opportunities available for innovative SMEs.

This chapter aims to:

- * introduce the main types of funding both international and local;
- * showcase the international funding instruments that are particularly relevant for the international growth of innovative SMEs.

You will gain insights into the nuances for key programs such as LIFE, DEP, EDF, EUROSTARS, EU4HEALTH, EIC Pathfinder, Transition, Accelerator, and the Innovation Fund. Each instrument will be explored in detail, providing you with the necessary tools to identify and leverage the best funding opportunities to support your international expansion and innovation strategies.



LIFE

LIFE is the main co-financing instrument for environmental and climate actions, and the programme also supports close-to-market projects and the deployment of green technologies.

QUICK FACTS

Activities

- Research, development and creation of innovative products.
- Buying necessary equipment and technologies.
- Expanding the R&D teams and hire talents.
- Internationalisation, access to new markets and business development across Europe.
- Pilot testing of your products in cooperation with end users.
- Testing innovative business and market strategies.
- Successful references from pilots in one or several European countries.

SME position	Single Beneficiary; Consortium Partner; Supplier
Types of funding	European-level
Path towards the international added value	R&D Internationalisation
Topics	 * Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation. * Clean Energy Transition. * Circular Economy and Quality of Life. * Nature & Biodiversity.
Grant per SME	Typically between €500 000 and €2 million (in cases of building costly pilot infrastructure several millions)
Funding rate	Typically up to 60-95%
Project timeline	Average project runs for 3-5 years

Did you know box: Did you know that LIFE has a close-to-market programme?



The LIFE programme helps companies bring their green products, technologies, services and processes to the market. These so-called close-to-market projects launch innovative, demonstrative solutions that offer clear environmental and/or climate benefits.

DIGITAL EUROPE PROGRAMME (DEP)

The Digital Europe Programme (DEP) is a new EU funding programme focused on bringing digital technology to businesses, citizens and public administrations.

QUICK FACTS Activities

- Research, development and creation of innovative products.
- Buying necessary equipment and technologies.
- Expanding the R&D teams and hire talents.
- Internationalisation, access to new markets and business development across Europe.
- Pilot testing of your products in cooperation with end users.
- Testing innovative business and market strategies.

	Successful references from pilots in one or several European countries.
SME position	Consortium Partner; Supplier
Types of funding	European-level
Path towards the international added value	R&D Internationalisation
Topics	 * High-performance computing: Ensure broad access to supercomputing, along with quantum computing. * Artificial intelligence: Establish EU-wide common data spaces using federated infrastructure, fostering AI adoption through a European platform and testing facilities. * Cybersecurity and trust: Develop advanced capabilities and quantum secure communication, promoting best practices and widespread cybersecurity solutions. * Advanced digital skills: Enhance education and training in key digital areas like computing, cybersecurity, and AI through collaboration among institutions, research centers, and businesses. * Adoption and best use of digital technologies: Establish European digital innovation hubs, driving digital transformation, addressing societal challenges, enhancing blockchain capacities, and promoting interoperability in public administrations.
Grant per SME	Typically between €500 000 and €1 million (in cases of developing and deploying complex projects several millions)
Funding rate	Typically between 50% - 100%

Average project runs for 2-4 years

EDF - CALL FOR SMEs

The European Defence Fund (EDF) fosters the competitiveness, efficiency and innovation capacity of the European defence technological and industrial base (EDTIB).

QUICK FACTS

Activities

Topics

- Research, development and creation of innovative products.
- Buying necessary equipment and technologies.
- Expanding the R&D teams and hire talents.
- Internationalisation, access to new markets and business development across Europe.
- Pilot testing of your products in cooperation with end users.
- Testing innovative business and market strategies.

	Successful references from pilots in one or several European countries.
SME position	Consortium Partner; Supplier
Types of funding	European-level
Path towards the international added value	R&D Internationalisation

Areas of interest include but not limited to:

- * Measurement and monitoring of physiological and cognitive state of soldiers.
- * Al and robotic autonomous systems; optimisation of cognitive performance in human-machine interaction.
- * Solutions for mechanical and "green" chemical recycling of waste of soldier equipment.
- * Technologies to ensure a safe water reuse.
- * Synthetic fuel production from waste and biomass for military use.

Grant per SME	Should not exceed EUR €6 million
Funding rate	Funding rate varies between 55%-100%
Project timeline	Average project runs for 1-4 years

Did you know box: Did you know that successful SMEs will be offered Business Coaching? This can help to reduce the time of bringing the results to the next phase, e.g., development.



Project timeline

EUROSTARS

Eurostars is the largest international funding program managed by national funding bodies and dedicated to supporting SMEs in collaborative R&D projects to create innovative products, processes, or services for commercialisation.

QUICK FACTS	
Activities	 Research, development and creation of innovative products. Buying necessary equipment and technologies. Expanding the R&D teams and hire talents. Pilot testing of your products in cooperation with end users. Successful references from pilots in one or several European countries.
SME position	Consortium Partner; Supplier
Types of funding	European and national-level
Path towards the international added value	R&D
Topics	No thematic restrictions, but projects need to reflect market demand and has an exclusive focus on civil applications
Maximum grant & funding rate	No formal limits on overall grant sizes, but national rules might apply, country-specific funding rates
Project timeline	Average project runs for 3 years

Did you know box: Did you know that Eurostars funding have significant business benefits for successful SMEs? 69% of companies enter new markets and 68% achieve improved market shares



EU4HEALTH

The EU4HEALTH aims to strengthen health systems, enhance crisis preparedness, foster innovation to address health challenges, and facilitate the development of more robust, resilient, and accessible health systems across the EU.

QUICK FACTS	
Activities	 Research, development and creation of innovative products. Buying necessary equipment and technologies. Expanding the R&D teams and hire talents. Internationalisation, access to new markets and business development across Europe. Pilot testing of your products in cooperation with end users. Testing innovative business and market strategies. Successful references from pilots in one or several European countries.
SME position	Consortium Partner; Supplier
Types of funding	European-level
Path towards the international added value	R&D Internationalisation
Topics	 * Improve health by supporting disease prevention, health promotion, and global health initiatives. * Protect against cross-border health threats by strengthening the Union's capabilities, establishing a new bio-preparedness authority (HERA), and enhancing stockpiling and medical staff reserves. * Enhance availability and affordability of medical products by encouraging sustainable production and supply chains, while promoting innovation and efficient use. * Strengthen health systems by boosting health data and digital tools (including supporting the creation of a European Health Data Space), promoting best practices and data sharing.
	The EU4Health 2024 has 4 overarching streams: (1) crisis preparedness; (2) health promotion and disease prevention; (3) health systems and healthcare workforce; and (4) digital.
Grant per SME	Maximum grant depends on the call
Funding rate	Up to 60%, in cases of exceptional utility, up to 80%
Project timeline	Average project runs for 1-4 years

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EUROPEAN INNOVATION COUNCIL PROGRAMMES

EIC Pathfinder

The EIC Pathfinder funding programme supports pioneering research at the forefront of science and technology to catalyze breakthrough innovations with the potential to disrupt industries and create new market opportunities.

QUICK FACTS	
Activities	 Research, development and creation of innovative products. Buying necessary equipment and technologies. Expanding the R&D teams and hire talents. Internationalisation, access to new markets and business development across Europe.
SME position	Open call: only consortium; Challenges: single beneficiary or consortium
Types of funding	European-level
Path towards the international added value	R&D Internationalisation
Topics	 * Funding research to develop the scientific basis to underpin breakthrough technologies. * Supporting the earliest stages of scientific, technological or deep-tech R&D, highest development stage should be proof-of-concept. * Aiming to build on new, cutting-edge directions in science and technology to disrupt a field and a market or create new opportunities. * Realising innovative technological solutions to identify, develop and scale up breakthrough technologies and disruptive innovations in Europe. * No predefined thematic priorities for the open call.
Funding rate	100% funding rate + access to Business Acceleration Services
Project timeline	Maximum duration is 4 years

EIC Transition

The EIC Transition programme provides support for advancing innovative technologies beyond the experimental stage, facilitating their validation for real-world application environments through prototyping, testing, and the development of sustainable business strategies aimed at commercialisation in high-potential markets.

QUICK FACTS	3
Activities	 Research, development and creation of innovative products. Buying necessary equipment and technologies. Expanding the R&D teams and hire talents. Internationalisation, access to new markets and business development across Europe. Pilot testing of your products in cooperation with end users. Testing innovative business and market strategies. Successful references from pilots in one or several European countries.
SME position	Single beneficiary or Consortium Partner
Types of funding	European-level
Path towards the international added value	R&D Internationalisation
Topics	 * Activities must include further technology development on the results achieved in a previous project and follow user-centric methodologies. * Validation and demonstration of novel technology in application-relevant environment and development of market readiness for future commercialisation.
Grant per SME	Grants of up to €2.5 million
Funding rate	100% funding rate
Project timeline	Between 1 and 3 years

Did you know box: Did you know that your proposal must build on results already achieved within an eligible EU-funded project? The project must further technology development of past project results but you do not need to be a participant or result owner of the previous projects, on the contrary, new participants including start-ups, SME or other innovation actors are welcome and encouraged to apply.

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EIC ACCELERATOR

The EIC Accelerator supports companies, principally SMEs and start-ups to scale up high impact innovations with the potential to create new markets or disrupt existing ones.

QUICK FACTS	í Í
Activities	 Internationalisation, access to new markets and business development across Europe. Pilot testing of your products in cooperation with end users. Testing innovative business and market strategies. Successful references from pilots in one or several European countries.
SME position	Single beneficiary
Types of funding	European-level
Path towards the international added value	R&D Internationalisation
Topics	 * Develop and scaleup mature innovations with the potential to create new markets or disrupt existing ones. * The funding opportunity is for finalising the product or technology to market readiness and scale-up of the business. * Open call has no predefined thematic priorities, the challenges focus on emerging and strategic technologies such as Net Zero Industry, Critical Raw Materials, RePower EU, the Health Emergency Response Authority (HERA), the draft AI act and the Chips Act.
Grant per SME	Grant component below €2.5 million for innovation activities; investment component of €0.5 – €15 million for scaling up and other activities
Funding rate	70% funding rate for the grant component
Project timeline	Maximum 2 years for innovation activities, could be longer with justification. Scale-up and market entry activities can follow this period.

Did you know that EIC Accelerator focuses on "patient capital"? The programme focuses on innovations which need significant funding over a long period of time for building on scientific discovery or technological breakthroughs ('deep tech') before returns can be generated, as such innovations often struggle to attract financing because the risks and time period involved are too high.

INNOVATION FUND

Financed through the auctioning of emission allowances from the EU Emissions Trading System, the Innovation Fund is one of the world's largest funding programmes for the demonstration of innovative low-carbon technologies.

QUICK FACTS	
Activities	 Buying necessary equipment and technologies. Internationalisation, access to new markets and business development across Europe. Pilot testing of your products in cooperation with end users. Testing innovative business and market strategies. Successful references from pilots in one or several European countries.
SME position	Single Beneficiary, Consortium Partner; Supplier
Types of funding	European-level
Path towards the international added value	Internationalisation
Topics	The programme expects that the technology had a small-scale demonstration and can be fully deployed.
	Projects should be commercial-scale production of an innovative product in the following areas:
	* highly innovative low-carbon technologies and processes in energy-intensive industries, including products substituting carbon-intensive ones;
	* innovative renewable energy generation and energy storage
	* carbon capture and storage (CCS) and carbon capture and utilisation (CCU);
	* the maritime, road transport and buildings sectors under the general decarbonisation topic.
Maximum grant & funding rate	Project costs categories: * Small-scale projects (between €2.5 million and €20 million). * Medium-sized projects (between €20 million and €100 million). * Large-scale projects (between €100 million or more).
	Co-funding rate can cover up to 60% of the project costs
Project timeline	Average project runs for 3-15 years

Question the answer