



Digital Europe Programme (DIGITAL)

Call for proposals

Advanced Digital Skills
(DIGITAL-2026-SKILLS-09)

Version 1.0
09 October 2025

HISTORY OF CHANGES			
Version	Publication Date	Change	Page
1.0	09.10.2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Initial version.	



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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O. 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 2024/2509 ([EU Financial Regulation](#))¹
- the basic act (Digital Europe Regulation [2021/694](#)²).

The call is launched in accordance with the 2025 - 2027 Work Programme³ and will be managed by the European Health and Digital Executive Agency (HaDEA) ('Agency').

The call covers the following topics:

- DIGITAL-2026-SKILLS-09-LEAGUE-OF-ACADEMIES – ELEVATE: European League of Advanced Digital Skills Academies
- DIGITAL-2026-SKILLS-09-COMPETITIONS – European Advanced Digital Skills Competitions

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 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, outcomes and deliverables, KPIs to measure outcomes and deliverables, targeted stakeholders, type of action and funding rate and specific topic conditions (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)

¹ Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/2509 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 September 2024 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union (recast) ('EU Financial Regulation') (OJ L, 2024/2509, 26.9.2024).

² Regulation (EU) 2021/694 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2021 establishing the Digital Europe Programme (OJ L 166, 11.5.2021, p. 1).

³ Commission Implementing Decision C(2025) 6650 of 06.10.2025 amending Implementing Decision C(2025) 1839 of Digital Europe Programme and the adoption of the work programme for 2025-2027.

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

You are also encouraged to visit the Digital Skills and Jobs Platform⁴ to consult the list of projects funded previously.

1. Background

Europe needs a workforce with advanced digital skills to develop, deploy and use cutting edge digital technologies and infrastructures that support its competitiveness, digital sovereignty, and the digital and green transitions. One of the Digital Decade targets is to significantly increase the number of information and communication technology (ICT) specialists in Europe by 2030, while promoting the access of women to this field and increasing the number of ICT graduates. The actions of this call will contribute to the Competitiveness Compass by improving the conditions for creating the necessary pool of skilled digital experts as well as to the establishment of a Union of Skills, focused on investment, adult and lifelong learning, skill retention and circulation.

This call covers two topics: a) DIGITAL-2026-SKILLS-09-LEAGUE-OF-ACADEMIES

- ELEVATE: European League of Advanced Digital Skills Academies; b) DIGITAL-2026-SKILLS-09-COMPETITIONS — European Advanced Digital Skills Competitions.

a) This umbrella initiative will foster synergies, coordinate and ensure coherence between the objectives of existing sectoral initiatives and the advanced digital skills academies (existing and upcoming) to minimize fragmentation risks and increase impact.

b) This initiative will serve as a catalyst for engaging young European people in cutting edge digital technologies. The competitions will support their creativity and connect them to the wider community of research organisations and industry players with the aim to address a highly relevant societal or industrial challenge.

2. Objectives — Scope — Outcomes and deliverables — KPIs to measure outcomes and deliverables — Targeted stakeholders — Type of action and funding rate — Specific topic conditions

DIGITAL-2026-SKILLS-09-LEAGUE-OF-ACADEMIES — ELEVATE: European League of Advanced Digital Skills Academies

Objectives

The Commission has set ambitious targets in the Digital Decade Policy Programme of reaching 20 million ICT professionals employed in Europe, while promoting access of women to this field, by 2030.

⁴ <https://digital-skills-jobs.europa.eu/en>

The Commission is supporting actions and initiatives to increase the number of ICT professionals and the access of women. However, effective collaboration among all relevant stakeholders in the field of advanced digital skills is crucial to reach the Digital Decade target.

This action will lead to the creation of a European League of Advanced Digital Skills Academies (ELEVATE), an umbrella initiative that will provide a governance framework that will foster implementation, synergies, coordinate and ensure coherence between the objectives of existing sectoral initiatives (i.e. the Cybersecurity Skills Academy⁵, EuroHPC skills community⁶), the newly created advanced digital skills academy in AI, Virtual Worlds, quantum and semiconductors (hereafter academies)⁷, and other EU-funded projects focusing on advanced digital skills (notably the DIGITAL-funded specialised education programmes⁸), to minimize fragmentation risks.

The action should also seek complementarities with related initiatives like the Digital Largescale Partnership under the New Pact for Skills, the European Digital Education Hub, Erasmus+ projects in the digital area, the Data Space for Skills⁹ and the European Skills Intelligence Observatory. It will leverage the Digital Skills and Jobs Platform (DSJP)¹⁰, which is hosting the advanced digital skills academies, to create a cohesive ecosystem¹¹.

ELEVATE will empower stakeholders through coordination, capacity building, communication and market intelligence, driving collective achievements in advanced digital skills.

Scope

ELEVATE will be structured around four pillars:

1. Coordination and collaboration

ELEVATE will carry out coordination and collaboration among advanced digital skills academies, other EU-funded projects on advanced digital skills (e.g. the specialised education programmes, the European Advanced Digital Skills Competitions¹²) and coordination and support actions (e.g. LEADSx2030¹³, DSJP and Advancing Girls and Women in Digital¹⁴) in advanced digital skills. The aim is to pool resources and expertise in order to strengthen and scale up efforts to close the advanced digital skills gap in Europe.

Under this pillar, ELEVATE will:

- Establish an agile multi-stakeholder governance structure to drive and oversee its activities and to ensure the achievement of its objectives.

⁵ Projects funded under the topic [DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05-CYBERACADEMY](#) (Cybersecurity Skills Academy) and other relevant projects

⁶ Project funded under the topic [DIGITAL-EUROHPC-JU-2023-ACADEMY-02-01](#) (EuroHPC Virtual Training Academy) and other relevant projects

⁷ Projects selected under the topic 4.1 of the Digital Europe Programme Work Programme 2025-2027

⁸ Awarded projects from topics: [DIGITAL-2021-SKILLS-01-SPECIALISED](#), [DIGITAL-2022-SKILLS-03-SPECIALISED-EDU](#), [DIGITAL-2023-SKILLS-05-SPECIALEDU](#) and [DIGITAL-2024-ADVANCED-DIGITAL-07-KEYCAPACITY](#)

⁹ [DS4skills](#)

¹⁰ <https://digital-skills-jobs.europa.eu/en>

¹¹ The selected project is not expected to create an additional platform outside the existing DSJP but will use the DSJP for its activities

¹² See topic DIGITAL-2026-SKILLS-09-COMPETITIONS — European Advanced Digital Skills Competitions below in this document

¹³ <https://advancedskills.eu/>

¹⁴ Project selected under the topic 4.6 of the Digital Europe Programme Work Programme 2025-2027

- Complement the information and best practices already provided on the DSJP¹⁵ and LEADSx2030 webpage¹⁶ with input from the advanced digital skills academies.
- Bring together the stakeholders from the different sectoral initiatives and the advanced digital skills ecosystem¹⁷ to:
 - ensure coordination and collaboration, including seeking partnerships and unifying advocacy for policy changes and systemic improvements, such as the provision of European joint degrees and micro credentials in advanced digital skills, strengthen networking and community building, fostering a sense of shared identity among initiatives, and
 - explore further actions to boost development and participation in advanced digital skills initiatives.
- Seek collaboration with the data space for skills¹⁸.

2. Capacity building

ELEVATE will carry out capacity building activities to reinforce the actions of the advanced digital skills academies and amplify their impact so they can collectively contribute to reaching the Digital Decade target on ICT professionals.

Under this pillar, ELEVATE will:

- Develop and implement a seal of quality/excellence for European ICT education and training courses by:
 - Defining a set of quality assurance standards and criteria to be fulfilled by the courses to receive the seal of quality/excellence,
 - Providing a recognisable visual identity for the seal (e.g. logo),
 - Assessing the education and training modules offered by upcoming advanced digital skills academies against the quality assurance standards and criteria, determining their eligibility for the seal, and awarding it,
 - Exploring the application of the seal to other existing and upcoming trainings at European level.
- Develop and implement in collaboration with the academies a framework for a European certification mechanism of modular learning credentials for ICT training participants in line with the 2022 Council Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials. The certification mechanism should, as far as possible, be linked to existing European Qualification Frameworks in digital areas such as the upcoming DigComp 3.0, European competence framework for quantum technologies (CFQT)¹⁹, the European cybersecurity skills framework (ECSF)²⁰ and other relevant frameworks. The use of digital credentials (e.g. EU

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

¹⁶ <https://advancedskills.eu/>

¹⁷ E.g. Higher education institutions, vocational and training institutions, other education and training providers, research institutes, centres of excellence, public administrations and/or governmental bodies, human resources organisations and employment agencies, IT developers, industry partners, trade and industry associations, alliances, social partners and NGOs.

¹⁸ <https://ds4skills.eu/>

¹⁹ [European competence framework for quantum technologies \(CFQT\) - Publications Office of the EU](https://ec.europa.eu/publications/european-competence-framework-quantum-technologies-cfqt_en)

²⁰ [ECSF, European cybersecurity skills framework - Publications Office of the EU](https://ec.europa.eu/publications/european-cybersecurity-skills-framework_en)

Digital Identity Wallets²¹ and/or European Digital Credentials for Learning²² is highly encouraged.

- Develop a common blueprint for fellowships within the academies.
- Develop a structural approach to support the Multipurpose Legal Gateway Offices and the upcoming EU Talent Pool to attract third country ICT specialists.
- Establish (cross-sectoral) mentoring programmes (e.g. for students with students, professionals with students or professionals with professionals), especially for underrepresented groups such as women.
- Organise a yearly EU virtual job and career fair in the technological areas of the academies (in cooperation with the academies and the DSJP).
- Contribute to the population of the DSJP's training catalogue with learning materials and training courses on advanced digital skills from various education and training providers in the EU in order to increase their reach and ensure EU-wide coverage.
- Establish an EU-wide advanced digital skills education and training alumni network for graduates who have participated in DIGITAL-funded education programmes as a way to increase the attractiveness of advanced digital skills higher education programmes in the EU. The main objectives of the alumni network are to showcase alumni achievements, encourage them to mentor current and future students and foster collaboration across different universities and industries. Activities could include hosting regular webinars, promoting alumni profiles online and connecting members to the other activities of ELEVATE (e.g. the EU virtual job and career fair and mentorship programmes).

3. Communication

Leveraging the DSJP, ELEVATE will carry out communication and awareness raising of the academies and other sectoral initiatives to increase their impact and reach.

Under this pillar, ELEVATE will:

- Promote the activities from the three other pillars.
- Support the promotion of the outcomes of the academies and sectoral initiatives.
- Support the promotion of the European Advanced Digital Skills Competitions, notably by helping create a landing page on the DSJP.

4. Market intelligence

ELEVATE will perform market analysis and impact assessment to provide additional insights into the existing education and training offer in advanced digital skills and to what extent the current offers match the current and future needs of the labour market.

It should leverage its network and all existing data/information and collaborate with EU funded actions in the field of digital skills and education (e.g. LEADSx2030 and the data space for skills).

In addition, ELEVATE should develop a repository of existing, and publicly available, advanced digital skills needs analyses to be hosted on the DSJP.

²¹ EU Digital Identity Wallet Home - [EU Digital Identity Wallet](#)

²² [European Digital Credentials for Learning](#) | [Europass](#)

This intelligence will provide input for:

- Complementing the training offer of the advanced digital skills academies and sectoral initiatives.
- Supporting the activities of the Multipurpose Legal Gateway Offices and the upcoming EU Talent Pool to attract third country ICT specialists.
- Assessing the need for additional academies in other technological areas.

Outcomes and deliverables

The consortium is expected to provide the following deliverables to ensure the effective functioning and sustainability of ELEVATE:

1. An agile multi-stakeholder governance structure to steer ELEVATE.
2. A stakeholder engagement plan, clearly identifying the stakeholders to be involved and the activities foreseen to secure their active participation.
3. A detailed plan on the activities to be carried out to complement the promotion of the Advanced Digital Skills Competitions.
4. A framework for the seal of quality/excellence for European ICT education and training, covering all relevant and necessary information, including at least the objectives, scope, standards and criteria, evaluation process, duration, visual identity, etc.
5. A framework for a European certification mechanism for modular learning credentials, aligned with EU micro-credentials and qualification frameworks.
6. A cross-sectoral mentoring programme, with particular attention to under-represented groups.
7. A common blueprint for fellowships within the academies.
8. An EU-wide alumni network for graduates of advanced digital skills training and education.
9. A communication plan detailing the communication, dissemination and outreach activities to support the activities of the four pillars.
10. A detailed market analysis and impact assessment on the current advanced digital skills education and training offer and the current and future labour market needs for ICT specialists.
11. A repository of existing and publicly available intelligence on advanced digital skills needs, to be hosted on the DSJP.

KPIs to measure outcomes and deliverables

Compulsory KPIs:

- Number of trainings receiving the seal of quality/excellence.
- Number of networking activities and events organised with stakeholders.
- Number of virtual EU job and career fairs organised and number of participants reached (employers and potential employees).

- Number of overall participants, number of women participating and number of Member States or countries associated with the Digital Europe Programme participating in the mentoring programmes.
- Number of alumni network members.
- Number of items added to the DSJP training catalogue.

Targeted stakeholders

Consortia are highly encouraged to include: higher education institutions, vocational and training institutions, other education and training providers, research institutes, centres of excellence, public administrations and/or governmental bodies, human resources organisations and employment agencies, IT professionals, industry partners, trade and industry associations, alliances, social partners and NGOs.

Type of action and funding rate

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, multi-beneficiary applications are mandatory and specific conditions for the consortium composition apply (see section 6).
- For this topic, the following reimbursement option for equipment costs applies: depreciation only (see section 10).
- For this topic, financial support to third parties is NOT allowed.
- 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-2026-SKILLS-09-COMPETITIONS — European Advanced Digital Skills Competitions

Objectives

The European Advanced Digital Skills Competitions will serve as catalysts for engaging young European people in cutting edge digital technologies. The competitions, understood as contests between competing teams, will support their creativity, expose them to project-based research and training, and connect them to the wider community of education and training organisations, research organisations and industry players. The competitions will address highly relevant European or local societal, technological and/or industrial challenges, understood as difficult tasks or problems to be solved. The

challenges will be developed with the involvement of **Europe's most prestigious research institutions and industry partners**.

There will be six competitions each covering one of the following areas: AI, Virtual Worlds, quantum, semiconductors, the Destination Earth initiative as well as an additional area chosen by the consortium.

The selected consortium will work in close cooperation with the projects implementing the respective advanced digital skills academies, either those already established (AI, Virtual Worlds, and quantum) or upcoming (semiconductors)²³, the Destination Earth initiative, the relevant industrial communities, and other related projects to ensure buy in and support from the relevant stakeholders in the ecosystem. Synergies should also be sought with other relevant initiatives, e.g. the Digital Education Hackathon²⁴.

The consortium will design and roll out the competitions based on 4 objectives:

1. addressing a highly relevant European or local societal, technological and/or industry relevant challenge,
2. attracting participation of a large number of students from tertiary level education institutions or equivalent and helping them to develop their skills (with the focus on hands-on advanced digital skills training and/or experiences),
3. raising the **students'** awareness and understanding of team and project-based work as well as applied research and innovation in the digital technologies, and
4. developing creative and solution-oriented thinking to drive technological **innovation and support the EU's digital transition**.

Scope

The selected project will identify for each competition at minimum 3 challenges. These challenges will tackle highly relevant European or local societal, technological and/or difficult industrial tasks or problems to be solved and will be developed with the involvement of **Europe's most prestigious research institutions and industry partners**. The challenges will differ for each digital area. Different teams of students will compete in each challenge.

Reach and communication: The competitions should attract the participation of the largest possible number of students from education and training institutions as well as involve research and industry partners. Additionally, the communication activities should reach the largest possible audience in as many EU Member States, EFTA countries and countries associated with the DIGITAL Programme²⁵ as possible.

The upcoming European League of Advanced Digital Skills Academies (ELEVATE)²⁶ will support the project in its communication activities, notably by helping it to create a landing page on the Digital Skills and Jobs Platform (DSJP).

In the proposal, the consortium should clearly demonstrate how it envisages to reach the largest possible audience (i.e. describing concrete activities to be carried out and estimating the budget needed for those activities). The consortium should also demonstrate how it envisages to reach the largest possible number of industry stakeholders, research institutions and other stakeholders that will follow the work of the competing teams. Those might support the competitions by, for example,

²³ Projects selected under the topic 4.1 of the Digital Europe Programme Work Programme 2025-2027

²⁴ <https://digieduhack.com/>

²⁵ [list_3rd-country-participation_digital_en.pdf](#)

²⁶ See the topic DIGITAL-2026-SKILLS-09-LEAGUE-OF-ACADEMIES — ELEVATE: European League of Advanced Digital Skills Academies of this call document

sponsoring the design of technical solutions (e.g. mock-ups, prototypes) students will develop to address the challenges or uptake of the best innovative solutions.

Geographical scope of the competitions: The competitions will take place in EU Member States and/or in countries associated with the DIGITAL Programme. Any physical events linked to the competitions should be hosted in these countries.

Diversity of the competition: Each challenge should be composed of several competing teams. Competing teams should represent students from tertiary education institutions or equivalent from at least 4 different education and training institutions from 4 different Member States or countries associated with the DIGITAL Programme. A team can be composed of students coming from one single institution²⁷. Participation of women in the teams should be encouraged.

The decision on the format of the (different phases of the) competitions is left to the awarded consortium. For the implementation of the competitions and its different phases, the use of financial support to third parties can be applied (see Budget categories and cost eligibility rules section). The consortia are encouraged to organise at least one physical event per competition, for example where the competing teams present their projects to the jury. In addition, at least one final physical event, to award the winning teams from the six competitions, should be organised in Brussels, with the support of the project ELEVATE.

The consortium will be also free to decide on the number of rounds of competitions or number of rounds of each of the defined challenges they will organise, the minimum number being one round during the lifetime of the project.

The project ELEVATE will also provide additional support for the competitions activities (e.g. supporting the drafting of the rulebooks, finding industry sponsors, organising events, developing branding and communication materials to be shared on the DSJP and social media).

Awards: The consortium will design attractive award packages for the winning team members (see Deliverables section). The consortium can envisage prizes using the financial support to third parties scheme (see Budget categories and cost eligibility rules section).

Outcomes and deliverables

Outcomes:

- Implementation and roll-out of 6 distinct competitions in the 6 digital areas, i.e. the four areas represented by the four sectoral advanced digital skills academies (AI, virtual worlds, quantum, and semiconductors), the Destination Earth initiative, and an area to be freely chosen by the consortium.
- An award ceremony organised in Brussels, with the support of the upcoming project ELEVATE, gathering all the winning teams from the six competitions.
- Involvement of industry stakeholders, which might lead to some of them deciding to sponsor the development of the solutions proposed by the teams.

Deliverables:

²⁷ Third country students (non-EU or non-DIGITAL associated countries students) enrolled in training institutions based in the EU or any country associated with the DIGITAL Programme are eligible to participate in the teams taking part in the competitions.

- At least 3 distinct challenges for each of the 6 competitions in the 6 digital areas, meeting the criteria mentioned in the *Scope* section above.
- Rulebooks (one for each of the six competitions) for participants and jury members addressing requirements ensuring gender and geographical balance. The rulebooks should include at the minimum:
 - **participants' educational level** (at least tertiary education or equivalent)
 - team size
 - **jury members' competencies**
 - conflict of interest rules (for both team members, organisers and jury members)

Furthermore, the rulebooks should clearly define the challenges to be resolved and set clear evaluation criteria for each competition.

- A roadmap outlining and detailing the implementation of the competitions, including time and duration of steps, their objectives and KPIs.
- A detailed communication strategy for the promotion of the competitions, including collaboration with relevant initiatives such as ELEVATE and the DSJP. The communication strategy should clearly state how the project will achieve the requirements set out under the *Scope* section.
- A proposal for attractive award packages (it could include, for example, a prize, a trophy, a diploma or certificate, a token from a sponsor) for the winning teams of the competitions.
- A detailed plan outlining the efforts needed to ensure the financial sustainability of the competitions after the end of the project.

KPIs to measure outcomes and deliverables

Compulsory KPIs

- Number of challenges per competition
- Number of teams per competition
- Number of participants per competition
- Number of Member States and DIGITAL associated countries represented in each competition
- Number of people reached through the communication campaign(s)
- Number of events organised (online and physical)
- Gender target

Additional KPIs that may be proposed

- Number of industry partners participating in the development of the competitions

Targeted stakeholders

Consortium may include: higher education institutions, vocational education and training institutions, other education and training providers, industry partners, research institutes, centres of excellence, public administrations and/or governmental bodies, IT professionals.

Type of Action and Funding Rate

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, multi-beneficiary applications are mandatory and specific conditions for the consortium composition apply (see section 6).
- For this topic, the following reimbursement option for equipment costs applies: depreciation only (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*

3. Available budget

The estimated available call budget is EUR 14 200 000.

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

Topic	Topic budget
DIGITAL-2026-SKILLS-09-LEAGUE-OF-ACADEMIES	EUR 7 200 000
DIGITAL-2026-SKILLS-09-COMPETITIONS	EUR 7 000 000

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:	4 November 2025

<u>Deadline for submission:</u>	<u>3 March 2026 – 17:00:00 CET</u> <u>(Brussels)</u>
Evaluation:	April-May 2026
Information on evaluation results:	June 2026
GA signature:	September 2026

5. Admissibility and documents

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

Proposals must be submitted electronically via the Funding & Tenders Portal Electronic Submission System (accessible via the Topic page in the [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 (*template to be downloaded from the Portal Submission System, completed, assembled and re-uploaded*)
- mandatory annexes and supporting documents (*templates to be downloaded from the Portal Submission System, completed, assembled and re-uploaded*):
 - detailed budget table/calculator: not applicable
 - CVs of core project team: not applicable
 - activity reports of last year: not applicable
 - list of previous projects (key projects for the last 4 years) (*template available in Part B*): applicable for topics **DIGITAL-2026-SKILLS-09-LEAGUE-OF-ACADEMIES** — **ELEVATE: European League of Advanced Digital Skills Academies** and **DIGITAL-2026-SKILLS-09-COMPETITIONS** — **European Advanced Digital Skills Competitions**

At proposal submission, you will have to confirm that you have the mandate to act for all applicants. Moreover you will have to confirm that the information in the application is correct and complete and that the participants comply with the conditions for receiving EU funding (especially eligibility, financial and operational capacity, exclusion, etc). Before signing the grant, each beneficiary and affiliated entity will have to confirm this again by signing a declaration of honour (DoH). Proposals without full support will be rejected.

Your application must be readable, accessible and printable.

Proposals are limited to maximum 50 pages (Part B). Evaluators will not consider any additional pages.

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

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

6. Eligibility

Eligible participants (eligible countries)

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

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

Beneficiaries and affiliated entities must register in the [Participant Register](#) — before submitting the proposal — and will have to be validated by the Central Validation Service (REA Validation). For the validation, they will be requested to upload documents showing legal status and origin.

Other entities may participate in other consortium roles, such as associated partners, subcontractors, third parties giving in-kind contributions, etc (see section 13).

Specific cases and definitions

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 persons²⁸.

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

Associations and interest groupings — Entities composed of members may participate as ‘sole beneficiaries’ or ‘beneficiaries without legal personality’²⁹.  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).

²⁸ See Article 200(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

²⁹ For the definitions, see Articles 190(2) and 200(2)(c) EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

Countries currently negotiating association agreements — Beneficiaries from countries with ongoing negotiations for participating in the programme (see *list of participating countries above*) may participate in the call and can sign grants if the negotiations are concluded before grant signature and if the association covers the call (i.e. is retroactive and covers both the part of the programme and the year when the call was launched).

EU restrictive measures — Special rules apply for 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)³⁰. Such entities are not eligible to participate in any capacity, including as beneficiaries, affiliated entities, associated partners, subcontractors or recipients of financial support to third parties (if any).

EU conditionality measures — Special rules apply for entities subject to measures adopted on the basis of EU Regulation 2020/2092³¹. Such entities are not eligible to participate in any funded role (beneficiaries, affiliated entities, subcontractors, recipients of financial support to third parties, etc). Currently such measures are in place for Hungarian public interest trusts established under the Hungarian Act IX of 2021 or any entity they maintain (see [Council Implementing Decision \(EU\) 2022/2506](#), as of 16 December 2022).

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

Consortium composition

Proposals must be submitted by:

for topic **DIGITAL-2026-SKILLS-09-LEAGUE-OF-ACADEMIES — ELEVATE: European League of Advanced Digital Skills Academies**

- minimum of 3 independent applicants (beneficiaries; not affiliated entities) from at least 3 different eligible countries.

for topic **DIGITAL-2026-SKILLS-09-COMPETITIONS — European Advanced Digital Skills Competitions**

- minimum of 3 independent applicants (beneficiaries; not affiliated entities) from at least 3 different eligible countries.

Eligible activities

Applications will only be considered eligible if their content corresponds wholly (or at least in part) to the topic description for which they are submitted.

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

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

Projects must comply with EU policy interests and priorities (*such as environment, social, security, industrial and trade policy, etc*). Projects must also respect EU values and European Commission policy regarding reputational matters (*e.g. activities*

³⁰ 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](#).

³¹ Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2020/2092 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2020 on a general regime of conditionality for the protection of the Union budget (OJ L 325, 20.12.2022, p. 94).

involving capacity building, policy support, awareness raising, communication, dissemination, etc).

Financial support to third parties (FSTP) is allowed in topic **DIGITAL-2026-SKILLS-09-COMPETITIONS** for grants or similar forms of support and prizes under the following conditions:

- the calls must be open, published widely and conform to EU standards concerning transparency, equal treatment, conflict of interest and confidentiality
- the calls must be published on the Funding & Tenders Portal, and on the **participants' websites**
- the calls must remain open for at least two months
- if call deadlines are changed this must immediately be published on the Portal and all registered applicants must be informed of the change
- **the outcome of the call must be published on the participants' websites**, including a description of the selected projects, award dates, project durations, and final recipient legal names and countries
- the calls must have a clear European dimension.

Financial support to third parties (FSTP) will be accepted in topic **DIGITAL-2026-SKILLS-09-COMPETITIONS** in projects which use grants/prizes or similar, in line with the topic specific requirements, to support students and participants to participate in the competitions.

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](#)³² 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 clearance (FSC) from the competent national security authority (NSA), in accordance with the national rules
 - handled only in a secured area accredited by the competent NSA

³² See Commission Decision 2015/444/EU, Euratom of 13 March 2015 on the security rules for protecting EU classified information (OJ L 72, 17.3.2015, p. 53).

- 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 continue 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 clearance may have to be provided before grant signature. The granting authority will assess the need for clearance 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 clearance.

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 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 capacity via the following information:

- general profiles (qualifications and experiences) of the staff responsible for managing and implementing the project
- description of the consortium participants
- list of previous projects (key projects for the last 4 years) (*template available in Part B*).

Additional supporting documents may be requested, if needed to confirm the operational capacity of any applicant.

Exclusion

Applicants which are subject to an EU exclusion decision or in one of the following exclusion situations that bar them from receiving EU funding can NOT participate³³:

- 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 misconduct³⁴ (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)

³³ See Articles 138 and 143 of EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

³⁴ 'Professional misconduct' includes, in particular, the following: violation of ethical standards of the profession; wrongful conduct with impact on professional credibility; breach of generally accepted professional ethical standards; false declarations/misrepresentation of information; participation in a

- committed fraud, corruption, links to a criminal organisation, money laundering, terrorism-related crimes (including terrorism financing), child labour or human trafficking (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)
- shown significant deficiencies in complying with main obligations under an EU procurement contract, grant agreement, prize, expert contract, or similar (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)
- guilty of irregularities within the meaning of Article 1(2) of EU Regulation [2988/95](#) (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)
- created under a different jurisdiction with the intent to circumvent fiscal, social or other legal obligations in the country of origin or created another entity with this purpose (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant)
- intentionally and without proper justification resisted³⁵ an investigation, check or audit carried out by an EU authorising officer (or their representative or auditor), OLAF, the EPPO, or the European Court of Auditors.

Applicants will also be rejected if it turns out that³⁶:

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

8. Evaluation and award procedure

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

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

For proposals with the same score (within a topic or budget envelope) a priority order will be determined according to the following approach:

cartel or other agreement distorting competition; violation of IPR; attempting to influence decision-making processes by taking advantage, through misrepresentation, of a conflict of interests, or to obtain confidential information from public authorities to gain an advantage; incitement to discrimination, hatred or violence or similar activities contrary to the EU values where negatively affecting or risking to affect the performance of a legal commitment.

³⁵ ‘Resisting an investigation, check or audit’ means carrying out actions with the goal or effect of preventing, hindering or delaying the conduct of any of the activities needed to perform the investigation, check or audit, such as refusing to grant the necessary access to its premises or any other areas used for business purposes, concealing or refusing to disclose information or providing false information.

³⁶ See Article 143 EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

Successively for every group of *ex aequo* proposals, starting with the highest scored group, and continuing in descending order:

- 1) Proposals focusing on a theme that is not otherwise covered by higher ranked proposals will be considered to have the highest priority.
- 2) The *ex aequo* proposals within the same topic will be prioritised according to the **scores they have been awarded for the award criterion 'Relevance'.** When these scores are equal, priority will be based on their scores for the criterion 'Impact'. When these scores are equal, priority will be based on their scores for the criterion 'Implementation'.
- 3) If this does not allow to determine the priority, a further prioritisation can be done by considering the overall proposal portfolio and the creation of positive synergies between proposals, or other factors related to the objectives of the call. These factors will be documented in the panel report.
- 4) After that, the remainder of the available call budget will be used to fund projects across the different topics in order to ensure a balanced spread of the geographical and thematic coverage and while respecting to the maximum possible extent the order of merit based on the evaluation of the award criteria.

All proposals will be informed about the evaluation result (evaluation result letter). Successful proposals will be invited for grant preparation; the other ones will be put on the reserve list or rejected.

 No commitment for funding — Invitation to grant preparation does NOT constitute a formal commitment for funding. We will still need to make various legal checks before grant award: *legal entity validation, financial capacity, exclusion check, etc.*

Grant preparation will involve a dialogue in order to fine-tune technical or financial aspects of the project and may require extra information from your side. It may also include adjustments to the proposal to address recommendations of the evaluation committee or other concerns. Full compliance will be a pre-condition for signing the grant.

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

9. Award criteria

The award criteria for this call are as follows:

1. Relevance

- 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*

2. 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

3. 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 budget (i.e. up to the budget ceiling). Other proposals will be rejected.

10. Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements

If you pass evaluation, your project will be invited for grant preparation, where you will be asked to prepare the Grant Agreement together with the EU Project Officer.

This Grant Agreement will set the framework for your grant and its terms and conditions, in particular concerning deliverables, reporting and payments.

The Model Grant Agreement that will be used (and all other relevant templates and guidance documents) can be found on [Portal Reference Documents](#).

Starting date and project duration

The project starting date and duration will be fixed in the Grant Agreement (*Data Sheet, point 1*). Normally the starting date will be after grant signature. A retroactive starting date can be granted exceptionally for duly justified reasons but never earlier than the proposal submission date.

Project duration:

- for topic **DIGITAL-2026-SKILLS-09-LEAGUE-OF-ACADEMIES — ELEVATE: European League of Advanced Digital Skills Academies**: 48 months
- for topic **DIGITAL-2026-SKILLS-09-COMPETITIONS — European Advanced Digital Skills Competitions**: indicative 36 months

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 (requested grant amount):

- for topic **DIGITAL-2026-SKILLS-09-LEAGUE-OF-ACADEMIES — ELEVATE: European League of Advanced Digital Skills Academies**: max EUR 7 200 000 per project
- for topic **DIGITAL-2026-SKILLS-09-COMPETITIONS — European Advanced Digital Skills Competitions**: max EUR 7 000 000 per project.

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-2026-SKILLS-09-COMPETITIONS — European Advanced Digital Skills Competitions**)
 - 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)³⁷: Yes
 - SME owner/natural person unit cost³⁸: Yes
- travel and subsistence unit costs³⁹: No (only actual costs)
- equipment costs:
 - depreciation (for topics **DIGITAL-2026-SKILLS-09-LEAGUE-OF-ACADEMIES — ELEVATE: European League of Advanced Digital Skills Academies** and **DIGITAL-2026-SKILLS-09-COMPETITIONS — European Advanced Digital Skills Competitions**)
- other cost categories:
 - costs for financial support to third parties: allowed for grants or similar and prizes:
 - for topic **DIGITAL-2026-SKILLS-09-COMPETITIONS — European Advanced Digital Skills Competitions**: maximum amount per third party EUR 60 000, unless a higher amount is required because the objective of the action would otherwise be impossible or overly difficult to achieve and this is duly justified in the Application Form.

³⁷ Decision of 29 June 2021 authorising the use of unit costs based on usual cost accounting practices for actions under the Digital Europe Programme.

³⁸ Commission Decision of 20 October 2020 authorising the use of unit costs for the personnel costs of the owners of small and medium-sized enterprises and beneficiaries that are natural persons not receiving a salary for the work carried out by themselves under an action or work programme (C(2020)7115).

³⁹ 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).

- internally invoiced goods and services (unit cost according to usual cost accounting practices)⁴⁰: Yes
- indirect cost flat-rate: 7% of the eligible direct costs (categories A-D, except volunteers costs and exempted specific cost categories, if any).
- VAT: non-deductible/non-refundable VAT is eligible (but please note that since 2013 VAT paid by beneficiaries that are public bodies acting as public authority is NOT eligible)
- other:
 - in-kind contributions for free are allowed, but cost-neutral, i.e. they cannot be declared as cost
 - kick-off meeting: costs for kick-off meeting organised by the granting authority are eligible (travel costs for maximum 2 persons, return ticket to Brussels and accommodation for one night) only if the meeting takes place after the project starting date set out in the Grant Agreement; the starting date can be changed through an amendment, if needed
 - project websites: communication costs for presenting the project on the **participants' websites or social media accounts** are eligible; costs for separate project websites are not eligible
 - other ineligible costs: No.

Reporting and payment arrangements

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

After grant signature, you will normally receive a prefinancing to start working on the project (float of normally 65% 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 be aware that payments will be automatically lowered if you or one of your consortium members has outstanding debts towards the EU (granting authority or other EU bodies). Such debts will be offset by us — in line with the conditions set out in the Grant Agreement (see art 22).

Please also note that you are responsible for keeping records on all the work done and the costs declared.

Prefinancing guarantees

If a prefinancing guarantee is required, it will be fixed in the Grant Agreement (*Data Sheet, point 4*). The amount will be set during grant preparation and it will normally be equal or lower than the prefinancing for your grant.

⁴⁰ [Decision](#) of 29 June 2021 authorising the use of unit costs based on usual cost accounting practices for actions under the Digital Europe Programme.

The guarantee should be in euro and issued by an approved bank/financial institution established in an EU Member State. If you are established in a non-EU country and would like to provide a guarantee from a bank/financial institution in your country, please contact us (this may be exceptionally accepted, if it offers equivalent security).

Amounts blocked in bank accounts will NOT be accepted as financial guarantees.

Prefinancing guarantees are normally requested from the coordinator, for the consortium. They must be provided during grant preparation, in time to make the prefintancing (scanned copy via Portal AND original by post).

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

The guarantee will be released at the end of the grant, in accordance with the conditions laid down in the Grant Agreement (*art 23*).

Certificates

Depending on the type of action, size of grant amount and type of beneficiaries, you may be requested to submit different certificates. The types, schedules and thresholds for each certificate are fixed in the Grant Agreement (*Data Sheet, point 4 and art 24*).

Liability regime for recoveries

The liability regime for recoveries will be fixed in the Grant Agreement (*Data Sheet, point 4.4 and art 22*).

For beneficiaries, it is one of the following:

- limited joint and several liability with individual ceilings — *each beneficiary up to their maximum grant amount*
- unconditional joint and several liability — *each beneficiary up to the maximum grant amount for the action*

or

- individual financial responsibility — *each beneficiary only for their own debts*.

In addition, the granting authority may require joint and several liability of affiliated entities (with their beneficiary).

Provisions concerning the project implementation

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 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 dissemination obligations: No
- 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

Consortium agreement: Yes

Non-compliance and breach of contract

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



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

11. How to submit an application

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

Submission is a 2-step process:

- a) create a user account and register your organisation

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

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

- b) submit the proposal

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

Submit your proposal in 3 parts, as follows:

- Part A includes administrative information about the applicant organisations (future coordinator, beneficiaries, affiliated entities and associated partners) and the summarised budget for the proposal. Fill it in directly online
- Part B (description of the action) covers the technical content of the proposal. Download the mandatory word template from the Submission System, fill it in and upload it as a PDF file
- Annexes (*see section 5*). Upload them as PDF file (single or multiple depending on the slots). Excel upload is sometimes possible, depending on the file type.

The proposal must keep to the page limits (*see section 5*); excess pages will be disregarded.

Documents must be uploaded to the right category in the Submission System, otherwise the proposal may be considered incomplete and thus inadmissible.

The proposal must be submitted before the call deadline (*see section 4*). After this deadline, the system is closed and proposals can no longer be submitted.

Once the proposal is submitted, you will receive a confirmation e-mail (with date and time of your application). If you do not receive this confirmation e-mail, it means your proposal has NOT been submitted. If you believe this is due to a fault in the Submission System, you should immediately file a complaint via the [IT Helpdesk webform](#), explaining the circumstances and attaching a copy of the proposal (and, if possible, screenshots to show what happened).

Details on processes and procedures are described in the [Online Manual](#). The Online Manual also contains the links to FAQs and detailed instructions regarding the Portal Electronic Exchange System.

12. Help

As far as possible, *please try to find the answers you need yourself*, in this and the other documentation (we have limited resources for handling direct enquiries):

- [Online Manual](#)
- Topic Q&A on the Topic page (for call-specific questions in open calls; not applicable for actions by invitation)
- [Portal FAQ](#) (for general questions).

Please also consult the Topic page regularly, since we will use it to publish call updates. (For invitations, we will contact you directly in case of a call update).

Contact

For individual questions on the Portal Submission System, please contact the [IT Helpdesk](#).

Non-IT related questions should be sent via the [Write to us](#) form.

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

13. Important



IMPORTANT

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

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

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

- **Balanced project budget** — Grant applications must ensure a balanced project budget and sufficient other resources to implement the project successfully (*e.g. own contributions, income generated by the action, financial contributions from third parties, etc.*). You may be requested to lower your estimated costs, if they are ineligible (including excessive).
- **Completed/ongoing projects** — Proposals for projects that have already been completed will be rejected; proposals for projects that have already started will be assessed on a case-by-case basis (in this case, no costs can be reimbursed for activities that took place before the project starting date/proposal submission).
- **No-profit rule** — Grants may NOT give a profit (*i.e. surplus of revenues + EU grant over costs*). This will be checked by us at the end of the project.
- **No cumulation of funding/no double funding** — It is strictly prohibited to **cumulate funding from the EU budget (except under 'EU Synergies actions')**. Outside such Synergies actions, any given action may receive only ONE grant from the EU budget and cost items may under NO circumstances be declared under two EU grants; projects must be designed as different actions, clearly delineated and separated for each grant (without overlaps).
- **Combination with EU operating grants** — Combination with EU operating grants is possible, if the project remains outside the operating grant work programme and you make sure that cost items are clearly separated in your accounting and NOT declared twice (see [AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement, art 6.2.E](#)).
- **Multiple proposals** — Applicants may submit more than one proposal for *different* projects under the same call (and be awarded 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 the others (or they will be rejected).

- **Resubmission** — Proposals may be changed and re-submitted until the deadline for submission.
- **Rejection** — By submitting the application, all applicants accept the call conditions set out in this this Call document (and the documents it refers to). Proposals that do not comply with all the call conditions will be rejected. This applies also to applicants: **All applicants need to fulfil the criteria; if any one of them doesn't, they must be replaced or the entire proposal will be rejected.**
- **Cancellation** — There may be circumstances which may require the cancellation of the call. In this case, you will be informed via a call or topic update. Please note that cancellations are without entitlement to compensation.
- **Language** — You can submit your proposal in any official EU language (project abstract/summary should however always be in English). For reasons of efficiency, we strongly advise you to use English for the entire application. If you need the call documentation in another official EU language, please submit a request within 10 days after call publication (for the contact information, see section 12).
- **Transparency** — In accordance with Article 38 of the [EU Financial Regulation](#), information about EU grants awarded is published each year on the [Europa website](#).

This includes:

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

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

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

Annex 1

Digital Europe types of action

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

Simple Grants

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

Funding rate: 50%

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

SME Support Actions

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

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

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

Coordination and Support Actions (CSAs)

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

Funding rate: 100%

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

Grants for Procurement

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

Funding rate: 50%

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

PAC Grants for Procurement

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

Funding rate: 50%

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

Grants for Financial Support

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

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

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

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

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

Lump Sum Grants

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

Funding rate: 50%

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

Framework Partnerships (FPAs) and Specific Grants (SGAs)

FPAs

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

Funding rate: no funding for FPA

SGAs

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

Funding rate: 50%

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

Annex 2

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

Security restrictions Article 12(5) and (6)

If indicated in the Digital Europe Work Programme, and if justified for security reasons, topics can exclude the participation of legal entities *established* in a third country or DEP associated country, or established in the EU territory but *controlled* by a third country or third country legal entities (including DEP associated countries)⁴¹.

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

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

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

In order to determine the ownership and control status, participants⁴² will be required to fill in and submit an [ownership control declaration](#)* as part of the proposal (and later on be requested to submit supporting documents) (see [Guidance on participation in DEP, HE, EDF and CEF-DIG restricted calls](#)).

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

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

Thus:

⁴¹ See Article 12(5) and (6) of the Digital Europe Regulation [2021/694](#).

⁴² Beneficiaries and affiliated entities, associated partners and subcontractors — except for entities that are validated as public bodies by the Central Validation Service.

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

Strategic autonomy restrictions Article 18(4)

If indicated in the Digital Europe Work Programme, calls can limit the participation to entities *established* in the EU, and/or entities established in third countries associated to the programme for EU strategic autonomy reasons⁴³.

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

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

⁴³ See Article 18(4) of the Digital Europe Regulation [2021/694](#).