

DECISION 34/2024
OF THE GOVERNING BOARD OF
THE EUROPEAN INSTITUTE OF INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY (EIT)

**ON THE APPROVAL OF THE EIT CALL FOR PROPOSALS 2025
FOR A NEW EIT KNOWLEDGE AND INNOVATION COMMUNITY (KIC)
ON WATER, MARINE AND MARITIME SECTORS AND ECOSYSTEMS**

THE GOVERNING BOARD OF THE EUROPEAN INSTITUTE OF INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY,

Having regard to Regulation (EU) No 2021/819 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 on the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (recast) (hereafter referred to as the “EIT Regulation”)¹, in particular Articles 6(c), 9 and 17(2) thereof, and point (d) of Section 2 of the Statutes as annexed to the EIT Regulation;

Having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/695 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 April 2021 establishing Horizon Europe – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, laying down its rules for participation and dissemination, and repealing Regulations (EU) No 1290/2013 and (EU) No 1291/2013 (hereafter referred to as the “Horizon Europe Regulation”)² in particular Articles 24 and 28 thereof;

Having regard to Decision 2021/820 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 on the Strategic Innovation Agenda of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) 2021-2027: Boosting the Innovation Talent and Capacity of Europe and repealing Decision No 1312/2013/EU (hereafter referred to as the “EIT SIA 2021-2027”)³, in particular Section 3.3 and Appendix 2 thereof;

Having regard to 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) (hereinafter referred to as the “EU Financial Regulation”)⁴;

Having regard to the Commission Staff Working Document of 27.6.2024 on a Commission ex-ante analysis on the relevance of a new Knowledge and Innovation Community of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology on Water, Marine and Maritime Sectors and Ecosystems and confirming its launch in 2026⁵;

Having regard to Decision 21/2019 of the Governing Board of the EIT of 25 September 2019 on the Financial Regulation of the EIT⁶, in particular Article 1 thereof;

Having regard to Decision 33/2024 of the Governing Board of the EIT of 30 October 2025 on the adoption of the evaluation criteria of the EIT Call for Proposals 2025 for a new EIT Knowledge and Innovation Community on Water, Marine and Maritime Sectors and Ecosystems⁷;

¹ OJ L 189, 28.5.2021, p. 61

² OJ L 170, 12.5.2021, p. 1

³ OJ L 189, 28.5.2021, p. 91

⁴ OJ L 2024/2509, 26.9.2024, p. 1-239

⁵ SWD(2024) 162 final, 27.6.2024

⁶ Ref. Ares(2019)6810859

⁷ Ref. Ares(2024)7798658

WHEREAS

- (1) During the 2021-2027 period, the EIT contributes to the general objectives of Horizon Europe, the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, by integrating the entrepreneurship-driven 'Knowledge Triangle' of business, higher education and research to boost disruptive innovation across Europe.
- (2) In accordance with Section 3.3 of the EIT SIA 2021-2027, in order to contribute to addressing new and emerging global challenges, the EIT shall launch open and transparent calls for proposals to create new Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) in priority fields selected among thematic areas of strategic importance and based on criteria assessing, inter alia, their relevance to the Union policy priorities with regard to addressing global and societal challenges, and their potential and added value to be addressed through the EIT model. The EIT SIA 2021-2027 requires the EIT to launch a second new KIC in the field of Water, Marine and Maritime Sectors and Ecosystems in 2026, with a call for proposals to be published in 2025.
- (3) Therefore, following the Commission ex-ante analysis of 27 June 2024 on the relevance of a new KIC on Water, Marine and Maritime Sectors and Ecosystems and confirming its launch in 2026⁸ with the Call for Proposals 2025, the EIT will launch the selection process.
- (4) With its Decision 33/2024 of 30 October 2024, the EIT Governing Board has adopted the evaluation criteria of the EIT Call for Proposals 2025 for the new KIC, and the criteria are published on the EIT website.
- (5) According to the Statutes annexed to the EIT Regulation, the EIT Governing Board shall adopt the selection procedure of the new KIC.
- (6) The EIT Call for Proposals 2025, as annexed to this Decision, has been developed in accordance with the Horizon Europe Regulation, the EIT Regulation and the EIT SIA 2021-2027, also taking into account the lessons learnt from the EIT Call for Proposals 2021, the Independent Observer, the IAS audit of the EIT Call for Proposals 2021, feedback from the EIT Governing Board and the EIT Staff, and the latest developments of the EIT KIC model.

HAS DECIDED AS FOLLOWS:

Article 1 ***Adoption***

The Call EIT for Proposals 2025 for a new EIT Knowledge and Innovation Community on Water, Marine and Maritime Sectors and Ecosystems, as annexed to this Decision, is hereby adopted.

Article 2 ***Confidentiality***

This Decision and all the documents related to the EIT Call for Proposals 2025 for a new KIC shall be kept in strict confidentiality until their publication on 16 January 2025.

⁸ SWD(2024) 162 final

Article 3
Entry into force

This Decision shall enter into force on the day of its signature.

Done in Budapest on 20 November 2024

[E-signed in ARES]

Stefan Dobrev
Chairperson of the EIT Governing Board

Annex - The EIT Call for Proposals 2025 for a new EIT Knowledge and Innovation Community on Water, Marine and
Maritime Sectors and Ecosystems



European Institute of
Innovation & Technology

A body of the European Union



EIT Call for Proposals 2025 for a new EIT Knowledge and Innovation Community (KIC) on Water, Marine and Maritime Sectors and Ecosystems ('Water')

Version 1.0
16 January 2025



HISTORY OF CHANGES			
Version	Publication Date	Change	Page
1.0	16.01.2025	Initial published version	



European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) Call for Proposals 2025 for a new EIT Knowledge and Innovation Community (KIC) on the Water, Marine and Maritime Sectors and Ecosystems ('Water')

Deadline for the submission of proposals:
17 June 2025 [17:00 Brussels local time]

1. Introduction

The European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) is a key driver of sustainable European economic growth and competitiveness. It reinforces the innovation capacity of the EU and its Member States to address the grand challenges facing European society.

During the 2021 to 2027 period, the EIT contributes to the general objectives of [Horizon Europe – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation](#) by integrating the entrepreneurship-driven 'knowledge triangle' of business, higher education and research to boost disruptive innovation across Europe.

To further enhance its impact and to incentivise the innovations needed to meet new societal challenges, the EIT will, as established in the [EIT Regulation](#) and [EIT Strategic Innovation Agenda \(SIA\) 2021-2027](#) gradually expand its portfolio of Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs). With this Call for Proposals, the EIT launches the selection process for a new KIC in the thematic area of Water, Marine and Maritime Sectors and Ecosystems.

2. Background

2.1 The EIT

Europe has excellent business, education and research organisations, leading to inventions whose innovation potential should be fully exploited. Europe's research and innovation systems should also be further integrated by developing poles of excellence to compete at a global level and by fostering closer collaboration between organisations from the knowledge triangle. Moreover, to create and nurture high-growth companies and capture the value of research and innovation outputs, Europe must do more and better to instil an entrepreneurial culture throughout society.

The EIT was created in 2008 to enhance Europe's ability to innovate by integrating, for the first time at the EU level, education and entrepreneurship with research and innovation. To achieve this goal, the EIT follows an 'investor approach', which stands for a focus on identifying the best strategic opportunities and selecting a portfolio of world-class partnerships – the KICs – to deliver them.



Through its KICs, the EIT develops and tests new models of how innovation is approached, managed, financed and delivered in Europe. The EIT has created new ecosystems in which innovation thrives and has generated breakthroughs in the way in which entrepreneurial and skills education, innovation and business cooperate. Ultimately, the EIT significantly boosts and accelerates the innovation process - from idea to product and service, from student and researcher to entrepreneur, from lab to the market; thereby triggering a change towards a more entrepreneurial mindset across the EU and beyond.

As a European Union body, the EIT shares new, innovative approaches and good practices emerging from its activities to the benefit of the entire European Union and its future generations.

The EIT is an integral part of Horizon Europe, the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation 2021-2027. To promote cross-fertilisation, the EIT and its KICs exploit synergies and complementarities with existing European and other relevant policies and programmes.

The EIT's legal framework can be found in the [EIT Regulation](#) and the [EIT Strategic Innovation Agenda 2021-2027](#).

2.2 EIT KICs

An EIT KIC promotes connectivity at all levels. It is an integrated partnership¹ bringing together leading companies, higher education institutions, research organisations and other stakeholders in the innovation process to tackle pressing societal challenges through the development of products, services, processes and business models, and also by nurturing innovative, entrepreneurial individuals. A KIC connects excellence-driven innovation hubs, the Co-location Centres², to become leading centres of excellence, competing and collaborating with other innovation hubs across the world.

A KIC follows a long-term innovation and impact-driven strategy, operating with a business logic and a results-oriented approach to contribute to the achievement of the EIT's overall mission, the priorities laid down in the [EIT Strategic Agenda 2021-2027](#) and the attainment of the general objectives established in Horizon Europe.

A KIC delivers a whole range of world-class activities bringing together actors from different sides of the knowledge triangle (business, education and research) encompassing the whole innovation value chain within a particular field. A KIC's portfolio of activities typically includes, inter alia: entrepreneurial

¹ In accordance with Article 2(2) of the EIT Regulation, 'Knowledge and Innovation Community' or 'KIC' means a large-scale Institutionalised European Partnership, as referred to in Regulation (EU) 2021/695, of higher education institutions, research organisations, companies and other stakeholders in the innovation process in the form of a strategic network, regardless of its legal form, based on joint mid- to long-term innovation planning to meet the EIT challenges and contribute to attaining the objectives established under Regulation (EU) 2021/695.

² In accordance with Article 2(3) of the EIT Regulation, 'co-location centre' means a physical hub, established in an open and transparent manner, which promotes links between and active collaboration among knowledge triangle actors and acts as a focal point for knowledge exchange and through which the KICs' partners are able to access facilities and the expertise needed to pursue their common objectives.



education and training programmes, research-driven innovation projects, and incubation of and support to start-ups and scale-ups. The EIT also encourages close collaboration between all its KICs.

A KIC is established as a legally and financially structured transparent partnership with a substantial degree of autonomy to set up its own governance system based on good governance principles provided by the EIT. A strong commitment by KIC partners, including financial support, is indispensable. It is mandatory for the KICs to remain open and flexible to attract new partners who bring added value to the partnership.

The obligation for a KIC to become financially sustainable in the long-term is a unique feature of the EIT's innovation model. In this context, a KIC must develop and implement a revenue-generating strategy to maintain its innovation ecosystem and activities beyond the period during which the EIT provides financial support through grant agreements.

In pursuing financial sustainability, the KIC should look for a diversification of its revenue and investment sources by mobilising funds from other public and private sources and to attract and engage the widest possible range of relevant new partners. The KIC should aim to maximise the share of contributions from private sources and from income generated by its activities and revenue-generating assets to pursue and achieve financial sustainability at the latest before the expiry of the [Partnership Agreement](#) with the EIT.

The EIT Regional Innovation Scheme (RIS) is mandatory for all KICs and an integral part of its multi-annual strategy. EIT RIS activities support the improvement of innovation capacity of countries, and regions in those countries, which are classified as modest and moderate innovation performers according to the [European Innovation Scoreboard](#), as well as the Outermost Regions, and facilitate the integration of new partners from those regions and countries into the KIC's communities. The KIC's EIT RIS activities should be aligned with the [EIT RIS Implementation Framework \(2022-2027\)](#) and deliver on the EIT RIS objectives presented in the EIT legislative framework.

In addition, a KIC is expected to take part in the **EIT Higher Education Institutions (HEI) Initiative**³ helping higher education institutions to build their capacity to innovate and to teach innovation and entrepreneurship.

2.2.1 Strategic approach

Partners in an EIT KIC design a realistic, specific, measurable, achievable and time-dependent strategy to address the concrete challenges posed in their thematic field. The strategy is accompanied by specific, relevant and measurable strategic objectives. This strategy must be aligned with the EIT's strategic objectives, cover at least 7 years and be based on the overriding principle of knowledge triangle integration, impact and excellence.

³ <https://eit-hei.eu/>



EIT KICs' strategic outlook considers where the highest innovation and commercialisation potential lies, and where the most significant impact can be achieved through integrating entrepreneurship and skills education, innovation and business creation / acceleration.

The Commission ex-ante analysis on the relevance of a new EIT KIC on Water, Marine and Maritime Sectors and Ecosystems reconfirmed relevance of the challenges faced by Water, Marine and Maritime Sectors and Ecosystems identified in the EIT Strategic Agenda 2021-27 and the relevance of the KIC innovation model in delivering solutions in response to these challenges. Furthermore, a KIC with an integrated approach to water, marine and maritime sectors and ecosystems holds significant potential in addressing fragmentation (incl. through EIT Regional Innovation Scheme), skills gaps and serves as a vital connecting node.⁴

The new KIC shall add value and demonstrate excellence in each activity area (innovation, entrepreneurship and skills education and business creation / acceleration), widely cover the relevant fields of the water, marine and maritime sectors and ecosystems and have a strategy in place to build on and upscale innovative solutions developed under existing programmes and initiatives such as Horizon Europe, EU Missions – notably the Mission Restore our Ocean and Waters – and relevant Horizon Europe partnerships.

2.2.2 Financial sustainability

One of the key features of the EIT is that each KIC must aim to become [financially sustainable](#)⁵ within a period of seven to 15 years after its designation. From the start, a KIC is expected to have a strong business logic and mind-set aiming to transform knowledge and other resources into revenues.

Financial sustainability means the capacity of a KIC to finance its knowledge triangle activities independently from EIT contributions. EIT's KICs must develop and implement revenue-creating strategies to maintain their innovation partnership and their activities beyond the period of EIT funding. Each KIC must aim to become financially sustainable within a period of 7 to 15 years after its designation by replacing EIT funding with other private and public sources, particularly via revenue streams like return on investments, revenue sharing, licensing, equity stakes in start-ups, commercialising education programmes, rendering services and consulting. Hence, from its onset a KIC must have a strong business logic and mindset to transform knowledge and other resources into revenues and decide:

- what its unique selling proposition will be,
- which financial assets it can create,

⁴ COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT on a Commission ex-ante analysis on the relevance of a new Knowledge and Innovation Community of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology on Water, Marine and Maritime Sectors and Ecosystems and confirming its launch in 2026: [https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/documents-register/detail?ref=SWD\(2024\)162&lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/documents-register/detail?ref=SWD(2024)162&lang=en)

⁵ Decision 6/2022 of 16 March 2022 of the EIT Governing Board on the amendment of the principles on the financial sustainability of Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) and repealing Decision 13/2021 of the Governing Board of the EIT



- what value it can add to the industry sector and what business opportunities could make a measurable impact on the societal challenge and facilitate financial sustainability in the medium term.

A market analysis is essential, including how and when to achieve a competitive position in the European and global marketplaces and how to use successful innovation to create revenues. It must also include how to raise capital and attract financing and co-funding into its activities from its partners. As a KIC develops, its financial needs increase – with consequences on how the KIC can attract complementary funding for its operations. Therefore, partners’ commitments are crucial, including financial support from the beginning.

2.2.3 Impact

Together with excellence, impact has been one of the guiding principles of the EIT since its creation. In a context of economic frailty, demonstrating a tangible and measurable impact is essential. The EIT Community⁶ is characterised by a focus on results and on achieving long-lasting impact in the way the EU approaches and manages innovation. It is therefore critical that the KIC demonstrates substantial impact at the socioeconomic level over time, and significant progress towards achieving its mission and objectives. The KIC should harvest intellectual, human, material and financial resources to create valuable outputs such as innovation communities, high quality curricula, start-ups, innovative products, services, technologies, through which it develops and sustains value-added business, enhances competencies necessary for innovation and entrepreneurship, and for developing solutions to major societal challenges.

A KIC is expected to create the following impacts:

- **technological/economic/innovation impact** by influencing the creation and growth of companies, as well as the creation and deployment at scale of new innovative solutions to address the global challenges, creating direct and indirect jobs and mobilising additional public and private investments;
- **educational impact** by strengthening human capital in research and innovation, enhancing innovative and entrepreneurial skills both at individual and organisational levels and fostering the creation and diffusion of knowledge and innovation openly within society;
- **societal impact**, including the impact derived by the delivery of systematic solutions within and beyond the EIT Community, also through Cross-KIC activities⁷, by addressing EU policy priorities in the Water, Marine and Maritime Sectors and Ecosystems (‘Water’) through innovative

⁶ In accordance with Article 2(8) of the EIT Regulation, ‘EIT Community’ means the EIT and the active community of individuals and legal entities which benefited or benefit from the EIT support or financial contribution.

⁷ In accordance with Article 2(10) of the EIT Regulation, ‘Cross-KIC activities’ means activities that aim to enhance cooperation and synergies between KICs, foster a more inter- disciplinary approach and create a critical mass among KICs to tackle topics of common interest.

solutions, engagement with citizens and end-users and by strengthening the uptake of innovative solutions in these areas in society.

This KIC approach to building systemic impact should be aligned with and contribute to Horizon Europe impact pathway approach as well as the [EIT Impact Framework](#)⁸ KPIs.

2.2.4 People, Talent and Start-ups

Whether innovation projects, entrepreneurial education courses or business creation, acceleration and coaching, a KIC puts talent at the centre of all its activities. It provides talented individuals with the opportunity to start a company, design a product, attract investment, launch a service, get a new degree or develop new skills, and advance their careers. It enables them to move – across national borders for new jobs, studies or training, or across the boundaries between industrial sectors or academic disciplines. Providing these opportunities is important; it should be reflected in the KIC's management model, its long-term strategy, its drive for excellence, and its portfolio of activities.

2.2.5 Partnership

The KIC is an integrated partnership, more specifically an 'Institutionalised European Partnership' under Horizon Europe. It operates within the EIT Community that brings together businesses (including SMEs), educational institutions, research organisations, and other innovation stakeholders such as public authorities and NGOs. From this core stems a network that enables national and cross-border EU collaboration, and offers the benefits of regional ecosystems, partners' facilities, factories, and classrooms for joint programmes and projects.

A KIC should be a **diverse and dynamic partnership** with a high innovation potential. The partnership is an essential feature of the KIC, and it must bring together players from across the knowledge triangle and across Europe and beyond. Partners should represent a broad range of Member States, including a diverse geographical spread, connecting in a balanced and collaborative manner. This diversity of partners is also essential as no two companies, universities or research institutes are the same and innovators within these companies, higher education or research institutions are also unique in terms of their skills, gender, culture, age, experience, etc.

A KIC should be an autonomous, **open and transparent partnership**. The partnership is responsible for setting up its internal organisation and agreements. It must embrace an open and transparent partnership growth strategy by raising awareness among stakeholders and enabling their participation, setting out transparent criteria for external organisations to join the partnership during the KIC's lifetime. Therefore, the KIC shall make available the partner entry and exit criteria, the application process for becoming a KIC partner and the redress procedure on its website. Moreover, calls for innovation activities and start-ups should as a rule ensure high degree of openness, in order to attract the best talents and ideas with the highest innovation potential.

⁸ Decision 8/2022 of the Governing Board of the EIT of 25 March 2022 on the EIT Key Performance Indicators (EIT KPIs)



The size of the partnership may vary during the KIC's lifetime, but is expected to increase rapidly after the start-up year. The initial consortium of partners that applies for this Call for Proposals has a crucial role in defining the core strategic elements of the KIC, successfully setting up its legal and the operational readiness, developing the EIT identity, and starting to implement the KIC's first activities. To define this together with the initial partners, a KIC receives EIT support during the first year through a Start-up Grant Agreement. As the volume and scope of activities grow in the following years, a KIC should then bring in new partners, provided they offer further value to the KIC. These new partners can join the KIC based on excellence and innovation relevance.

2.2.6 Governance and management

As an Institutionalised European Partnership, the KIC should act in the EU public interest. The KIC should aim to develop a clear structure for collaboration among partners so that the mission of the EIT can be fully achieved.

The choice of an appropriate legal entity for a KIC is crucial; it integrates KIC partners and is the focal point for any interaction between the EIT and the partnership. It is the KIC Legal Entity (KIC LE) that, mandated by the KIC partnership, signs the [Partnership Agreement](#) and the [Grant Agreements](#) with the EIT.

The KIC governance model and the KIC LE are key elements that differentiate EIT KICs from other European partnerships. In its start-up year, the newly designated consortium for a new KIC sets up the legal structure, including the KIC Legal Entity and the CLCs across Europe that function similarly to regional branches, with an independent management team and supervisory board.

The legal structure chosen by a KIC should reflect the business mindset of a KIC, its business model and commitment of various partners. In addition, the choice of legal entity determines the governance structures of the KIC. Whatever the structure, its leading principle must be business-like logic and flexibility to make quick decisions.

The KIC Legal Entity should be lean and fit for purpose based on the KIC's strategy, ensuring smooth management and operation of the KIC in an effective and efficient way. The KIC Legal Entity must act in the best interest of the KIC, safeguarding its goals, mission and identity independently from the particular interest of individual partners.

The KIC should ensure a top-quality governance and management. The governance and organisation of a KIC should be well thought-out, taking the knowledge triangle integration process as a starting point. Within principles of good governance, a KIC is free to define its own internal organisation and management structure – but experience shows that complexity in governance structures should be avoided, and a strong, lean and flexible management approach is needed to implement a KIC strategy.

Appropriate governance model is fundamental for the successful implementation of the strategy and future financial sustainability of the KIC. It should have clear leadership with a Chief Executive Officer



(CEO), supported by an executive team consisting of top management positions such as a Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and Chief Operating Officer (COO). They should have executive power over the management and finances of the KIC.

Particular attention should be paid to talent management and finding the right people for the diverse profiles required to deliver on the KIC's strategy. KICs hire professionals with key skills, including sector knowledge, a business mindset and experience in impact investment and asset management. In addition, KICs build strong project management offices composed of professionals in EU and Horizon Europe funding, project management and reporting.

The partners should be represented together with independent members by participation in the Supervisory Board and Assemblies. A KIC and its partners must have a code of good conduct including a policy on conflicts of interest and an Anti-Fraud Strategy, as well as all members must be committed to the successful implementation of the KIC's strategy.

In order to emphasise best practices and ensure compliance with fundamental principles applicable to public funds, the EIT has set out **principles of good governance** in Article 6 of the [Partnership Agreement](#). In particular, the KIC governance and management structure must:

- ensure compliance with the provisions of Article 10 of the Horizon Europe Regulation and the criteria for the selection, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and phasing out laid down in Annex III of the Horizon Europe Regulation;
- reflect diversity, in particular with regard to gender, geographical and professional background;
- reflect the diversity in the composition of the KIC, in particular the balance within the knowledge triangle;
- separate ownership and membership from operational management;
- separate the supervisory functions from the operations;
- have a size which allows the KIC to function in an effective and efficient way;
- separate the decisions on activities, on KIC funding schemes and distribution of funding from their implementation;
- ensure that at least half of the members — including the chairperson — of the body with supervisory functions are independent from the KIC partners;
- be composed of high-quality members who are selected in a transparent and competitive procedure;
- have an effective supervision or ownership over the entities with a CLC role.

Furthermore, the KIC will be steered by the EIT Governing Board, which provides strategic direction for the entire EIT Community. The EIT will closely monitor the KIC's implementation of the good governance principles and the EIT Governing Board will take corrective measures in line with the [Supervision Framework](#)⁹, when needed.

⁹ Decision 42/2021 of the EIT Governing Board on the supervision framework for Knowledge and Innovation Communities

The KIC must have an effective operational structure to implement the KIC Strategic Agenda and the KIC Business Plans.

2.2.7 Openness and transparency

Openness and transparency are very much stressed as key principles in the EIT Regulation and the EIT Strategic Innovation Agenda 2021-2027. These notions cover various aspects of the KIC operations which are defined in the [Partnership Agreement](#).

Openness: the KIC must ensure continuous openness and transparency during implementation, notably for priority setting, and must involve all relevant partners and stakeholders to maximise its impact. The KIC must develop and implement an ambitious growth strategy, be open to new partners by raising awareness among stakeholders and enabling their participation, launching open calls not restricted to partners and remain open during its lifetime. The KIC must ensure a high degree of openness when managing KIC funding schemes, including openness of calls for projects to non-KIC partners. The rules on these calls for proposals of KICs are laid down in the EIT specific rules of Annex 5 of the [Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement](#).

Transparency: the KIC must be transparent, by publishing on its website and providing the EIT with information and key documents in due time about the KIC's vision, objectives and main activities, as defined in the KIC Strategic Agenda; KIC set-up and governance; KIC partnership issues, e.g. partner entry and exit criteria and application process for becoming a KIC partner and redress procedure. The KIC shall transparently publish the main documents relating to its activities, such as the Business Plans, annual reports and information on ongoing activities, outcome and results, calls for RIS hubs. The KIC shall publish its open funding schemes on the EU Funding & Tenders Portal under Horizon Europe.

2.2.8 The EIT Innovation Hubs: Co-location Centres and RIS hubs

A KIC brings together organisations of different sectors, countries and disciplines. This is enabled physically through EIT Innovation Hubs or co-location centres which are the main instrument for managing activities and knowledge flow.

A 'co-location centre' (CLC) is a physical hub, established in an open and transparent manner, that promotes links between and active collaboration among knowledge triangle actors. It acts as a focal point for knowledge exchange and KIC's partners are able to access facilities and the expertise needed to pursue their common objectives there.

A KIC should set up five to eight CLCs with partners in close proximity. CLCs should remain open and integrated into local ecosystems. CLCs are the focal point for the KIC's activity within these areas of focus. These Innovation Hubs should build on the existing labs, offices or campuses of some of the KIC's core partners. There they bring together people and teams from across the knowledge triangle to deliver on skills and entrepreneurial education, innovation and start-up creation and growth. When selecting the locations of the CLCs, KICs should also consider geographical diversity in order to be able to tap into the innovation potential throughout Europe.



An ‘**EIT RIS hub**’ means a physical hub, established by a KIC and forming part of its structure, in a Member State or in a Horizon Europe associated country targeted by the [Regional Innovation Scheme \(RIS\)](#) that serves as focal point for the KIC’s activities and for the mobilisation and involvement of local knowledge triangle actors in the activities of the KIC.

RIS Hubs are a central element of the EIT RIS’ ‘place-based’ innovation approach and a crucial tool in supporting the objective of attracting and facilitating the integration of potential new partners in the KIC, address the local ecosystem needs in EIT RIS countries and regions, as well as, to bridge the innovation gap within Europe. RIS Hubs can have a single country-focus, a regional-focus or a multi-country focus. RIS Hubs could pave the way to the establishment of a CLC in the targeted region.

As part of the KIC’s strategy, which fundamentally includes synergies with other initiatives, the innovation capacity and potential impact of all Innovation Hubs together must be greater than their individual strengths. They should give the KIC critical mass on a European scale, forming a continent-spanning network that enables partners to tap into the best talent, ideas and resources. A KIC should choose a hub model best suited to its strategy. The management structure of a hub should also conform to principles of good governance, in particular reflecting the diversity in the composition of the partners (ensuring a proper balance within the knowledge triangle), ensuring openness to new partners, an open and high-quality decision-making process, and separating the supervisory function from the operations.

2.2.9 Synergies

Seeking collaboration at the local, regional and national levels is an important element of a KIC’s synergies portfolio. It brings more stakeholders into the knowledge economy and gives a greater push to open innovation in the EU.

In this way, a KIC gradually develops an extensive network of organisations at different dimensions and levels, thematic and horizontal, strategic and operational. It works closely with the EIT, which fosters synergies and interaction between KICs and with other institutional stakeholders. A KIC maintains a structured dialogue with European Commission services to provide input and feedback to policymakers. And it continuously seeks consistency with and contributes to EU priorities. Cooperation with the European Innovation Council (EIC) is encouraged under Horizon Europe’s Pillar III. EIT and EIC cooperation is especially valued when it comes to supporting and accelerating innovative start-ups and scale-ups.

The EIT and the EIC are complementary EU funding programmes and have concluded a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)¹⁰ to give young businesses access to both EIC and EIT services. That includes access to finance opportunities with KIC investors and the EIC blended financing programme with the European Investment Bank (EIB). Furthermore, the EIT and the EIC cooperate to help research results become innovation opportunities. They facilitate market access to start-ups and SMEs, support women innovators to close the gender gap and give special attention to start-ups and SMEs from regions and countries classified as emerging or moderate innovation ecosystems.

¹⁰ https://eit.europa.eu/sites/default/files/memorandum_of_understanding-eic-eit_08012021_signed.pdf



Against the backdrop of European Green Deal, the EIT's new KIC shall be positioned within the EU Water Framework Directive and Marine Strategy Framework Directive and any other relevant policy initiatives, as also mentioned in the EIT SIA Factsheet and the subsequent Commission ex-ante analysis. The new KIC should build synergies with and have a strategy in place to build on and upscale innovative solutions developed under existing programmes and initiatives, such as the EU Mission *Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030*, the European Partnership for a climate neutral, sustainable and productive Blue Economy, the European Biodiversity Partnership, the European Partnership Water Security for the Planet (Water4All), European Partnership on Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA), the Zero Emission Waterborne Transport Partnership, the Smart Specialisation Strategies, the InvestEU Advisory Hub, BlueInvest, the Single Market Programme and the Enterprise Europe Network. In addition, close cooperation with the European Innovation Council is encouraged particularly in supporting and accelerating innovative start-ups and scale-ups.

A KIC has a **strategy for synergies** and a roadmap to achieve its objectives by identifying the following items:

- **Who:** whom to work with.
- **What:** activities of mutual interest.
- **Where:** in which areas/programmes/policies.
- **When:** the timeline for developing the collaboration.
- **Why:** the added value of this collaboration.

2.2.10 Cross-KIC cooperation and sharing of experience

Through Cross-KIC activities KICs enhance cooperation and synergies among themselves. They foster more inter-disciplinary approaches and tackle topics of common interest. The EIT Regulation states that they may be up to 100 % funded by the EIT, upon decision of the EIT Governing Board. It also recognises the high potential of these activities where several KICs already address common EU policy priorities and where no dedicated EIT KIC exists.

The new KIC is strongly encouraged to seek complementarities with other KICs from its onset, as well as learn from the success of other KICs, in particular, the 1st wave KICs who have achieved financial sustainability goal.

2.2.11 Contributing to the EIT Community branding and communication

The EIT Community is a thriving community that brings together innovators and organisations from the EIT, its KICs, and the EIT Alumni. The EIT Community brand unites all who innovate with the EIT Community: innovators, entrepreneurs, students, organisations from business, education, research, civil society, authorities and last but not least, citizens.

It is important that the KIC is consistent in its approach to the EIT branding and communications. Since EIT grants are financed by European Union funds, a KIC and its beneficiaries must actively engage in



communication activities to promote the projects and to publicly acknowledge EIT and EU support. A KIC should therefore have a communications strategy in place and annual communications plan focused on their innovation and entrepreneurship approach, activities, and results.

When communicating, a KIC must contribute to the development of an innovative ecosystem and must adhere to the EIT Community Brand guidelines. These outline the use of the logo, EU co-branding, brand visuals and brand tone and can be viewed [here](#).

2.2.12 Dissemination of results and valorisation of knowledge

A KIC shares and exchanges knowledge, generated intellectual assets, information, results and lessons learned from its activities and achievements with external stakeholders across the European innovation landscape through outreach, dissemination and valorisation activities, thereby promoting a faster uptake of innovation models across the European Union. The KIC must put forward its results, products and companies, to the market and to society at large. Dissemination, exploitation, valorisation and communication all aim to help maximising the impact of research and innovation actions.

The objective of dissemination is to transfer knowledge and results with the aim to enable others to use and take up results; the objective of exploitation is to effectively use results through scientific, economic, political or societal exploitation routes. To reach this and to ensure an integrated approach together with communication activities, the KIC should define a dissemination strategy (in line with their IP policy) as well as annual plans.

The objective of knowledge valorisation is the process of creating social and economic value from knowledge by linking different areas and sectors and by transforming data, know-how and research results into sustainable products, services, solutions and knowledge-based policies that benefit society.¹¹

Moreover, by identifying, analysing and sharing good and novel innovation practices, the KIC should ensure that knowledge generated within its activities is disseminated and capitalised upon for the benefit of people and organisations, including those not directly benefiting from working with the EIT Community.

2.2.13 EIT financial contribution

The EIT financial contribution is allocated so that it balances the requirement to support the KICs' long-term strategy while rewarding each KIC for its excellence, impact ambition and implementation in the mid-term. As set out in the EIT Regulation, the EIT contribution to the KICs shall gradually decrease over time in compliance with the funding rates defined in the EIT Strategic Innovation Agenda 2021-2027 as follows:

¹¹ [Guiding Principles for Knowledge Valorisation and implementing Codes of Practice](#)



	Start-up	Ramp-up	Maturity	Exit from EIT grant
Years	1*-4	5-7	8-11	12-15
EIT funding rate	Up to 100%	Up to 80%	Up to 70%	50% at year 12, decreasing by 10 percentage points per annum

**Year 1 is for the start-up grant*

The KIC or its partner organisations may apply for Union financial contribution, in particular in the framework of Union programmes and funds, in accordance with their respective rules. In that case, such contribution shall not cover the same activity already funded under another European Union programme. Contributions from partner organisations to the financing of KICs shall be determined in accordance with the funding rates defined in the EIT Strategic Innovation Agenda 2021-2027 and reflect the KIC's strategy for financial sustainability.

2.2.14 Portfolio approach

The business plans are designed at the portfolio level and provide an overview of all activities to be implemented. That includes budgets and impact targets measured through key performance indicators. In practice it means that KIC Business Plans do not contain details of each specific project to be implemented by the KIC. Instead, specific details about each project are collected regularly during implementation in line with a pre-defined dataset.

The portfolio description also indicates how the KIC will respect the principles that need to be complied with when selecting and implementing projects and recipients for EIT funding (e.g. principles of sound financial management, financial sustainability, good governance, openness and transparency and avoidance of conflict of interests, among others).

An essential component of this approach is reinforced monitoring by the EIT, relying on the data delivered by all the KICs to ensure that the necessary information is collected for business intelligence and assurance purposes.

2.2.15 Cascade funding model

The cascade funding model, known as 'Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP)' under the [EU Financial Regulation](#) or 'sub-granting', is a commonly used mechanism to implement activities under EU funding. It means that the implementation of portfolio of activities is cascaded by the beneficiary to further recipients of the EU grant through calls. In the case of the fully cascaded model, FSTP is applied to a larger extent, meaning that a larger proportion of the grant is spent by sub-grantees.



In the EIT context:

- The only beneficiaries of the grant agreements signed by the EIT and the KICs are the KIC Legal Entity (acting as a 'coordinator') and/or the Co-Location Centres (CLCs) acceding to the grant agreement as beneficiaries or affiliated entities.
- KIC partners can be recipients of FSTP but do not accede directly to the grant agreement. KIC partners participate in the implementation of the KIC business plan and contribute to the delivery of the KIC's impact and financial sustainability. Sub-grants must be awarded following calls launched based on clear and transparent criteria that are spelled out in the KIC business plan. The rules on calls for proposals of KICs are laid down in the EIT specific rules of Annex 5 of [Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement](#).

3. Topic of the Call for Proposals

For information on the thematic scope of this KIC, please consult the [SIA factsheet on Water, Marine and Maritime Sectors and Ecosystems](#) and [the Commission Staff Working document on a Commission ex-ante analysis on the relevance of a new Knowledge and Innovation Community of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology on Water, Marine and Maritime Sectors and Ecosystems and confirming its launch in 2026](#), also available in the annexes of this call.

4. Indicative budget to the KICs in the 2021-2027 period

For the period 2021-2027, the EIT is funded through a financial contribution from Horizon Europe set at EUR 2 965 000 000.

The EIT budget covers three main components during this period:

- (1) expenditure for the existing nine KICs (reflecting that for three of them the Partnership Agreements have come to an end by 2024 and as of 1 January 2025 the cooperation with these KICs continue under the terms of the Memoranda of Cooperation) and the launch of one new KIC in 2026;
- (2) EIT administrative expenditure; and
- (3) expenses for preparation, monitoring, control, audit, evaluation and other activities and expenditures necessary for managing and implementing the activities of the EIT, as well as evaluating the achievement of its objectives in accordance with Article 12(6) of the Horizon Europe Regulation.

In accordance with the EIT Strategic Innovation Agenda 2021-2027, around **EUR 2 854 000 000** (96 % of the total EIT budget) is envisaged to fund existing and the new KIC in the period of 2021-2027 of which:

- (a) at least 10 % and a maximum of 15 % shall be dedicated to the RIS;
- (b) a maximum of 7 % shall be dedicated to Cross-KIC activities, including support for KICs for which the Partnership Agreement is expired or terminated;



- (c) a maximum of 3 % had to be dedicated to a pilot higher education initiative of three years.

The indicative amount for the Start-up Grant of the new KIC in 2026 is EUR 5 million. The practice shows that following the start-up period, the EIT grant for the first Business Plan is between EUR 20 – 35 million per year.

The grant amounts which will be allocated to the new KIC as from 2027 will be subject to EIT Governing Board funding allocation decisions.

Maximum funding rate: as mentioned in Section 2.2.12 above, the EIT financial contribution to the KICs may cover up to 100 % of the total eligible costs of KIC added-value activities in the initial stages of a KIC's life cycle. Such a contribution shall gradually decrease over time in accordance with the funding rates set in the SIA.

The financing modalities are defined in accordance with the [EIT Principles for financing, monitoring and evaluating KIC activities](#) and the [EU Financial Regulation](#).

The **form of grant**, the **reimbursement rate** and the **types of costs**, including the **eligible costs** are indicated in Articles 5-6 of the [Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement](#).

5. Timetable, proposal preparation and submission

This section contains an overview on the preparation and submission of a KIC proposal - further information is available at the Call for Proposals page of the [EIT website](#), or directly through the Funding & Tenders Portal <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/how-to-participate/participant-register>.

The electronic submission service of the Funding & Tenders Portal will open on **20 February 2025**.

Only proposals submitted through the electronic proposal submission system will be accepted.

5.1 Timetable

The submission and evaluation procedure will be managed as follows:

Table 1 – Timetable

	Steps	Date and time
(a)	Publication of the call for proposals	16 January 2025
(b)	Deadline for submitting applications	17 June 2025 17.00 Brussels time



	Steps	Date and time
(c)	Evaluation period: - EIT evaluation of the admissibility, eligibility, selection criteria - Expert evaluation of the award criteria	18 June – September 2025 (indicatively)
(d)	Governing Board decision on the expert evaluation phase	End October 2025 (indicatively)
(e)	Invitation to the hearings	November 2025 (indicatively)
(f)	Hearings with the EIT Governing Board, designation decision	November 2025 (indicatively)
(g)	Information to applicants	November 2025 (indicatively)
(h)	Invitation for submission of Start-up Plan (only for the successful and designated consortium)	December 2025 (indicatively)
(i)	Signature of Start-up Grant Agreement	February 2026 (indicatively)
(j)	Signature of Partnership Agreement	End of 2026 (indicatively)

5.2 Proposal content and structure

The proposal will contain the following sections:

- **Part A** – this part contains administrative information on the proposal, the Coordinator and applicants (consortium members)¹², including declarations that they are not in a situation leading to exclusion

(Template A – Application form and DoH template)

- **Part B1** – this part includes the main body of the proposal and the following elements should be included:
 - **KIC excellence**, including the KIC strategic approach, key identified thematic areas, innovativeness and KIC partnership innovation potential, readiness to establish concrete synergies and complementarities with other relevant initiatives (maximum 20 pages)
 - **KIC implementation**, including the KIC's leadership principles, team profile requirements, key considerations for setting up operational structures and co-location centres, KIC business model and financial plan (including estimated EIT and non-EIT financial

¹² Proposals will be evaluated solely based on the consortium members that are included in the Part A. Applicants in their proposals should not name other organisations that are not members of consortium (e.g. 'network partners', organisations that 'endorse' or 'support' a proposal, etc.), as this information will not be taken into account during the evaluation. Any prospective enlargement of the KIC partnership should be described as part of the open and transparent partnership growth strategy.



resources) and plans for attracting financial resources and achieving long-term financial sustainability (maximum 12 pages)

- **KIC impact**, including planned pan-European impact on the societal challenge, human capital, job creation, economic growth demonstrated by the strategy, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and KIC Scoreboard, KIC communications strategy, and outreach (in particular EIT Regional Innovation Scheme); and dissemination and valorisation plans including the collaboration with other relevant partnerships and Missions funded under Horizon Europe and the contribution to building the EIT Community brand identity (maximum 18 pages)

(Template B1 – Proposal)

- **Part B2** – this part contains the estimated financial resources

(Template B2 – Estimated financial resources)

- **Part B3** – this part contains a declaration from the legal representative of each consortium member¹³ on their motivation and endorsement of the proposal, and their commitment, including financial commitment (indicative budget per partner), to the objectives and aims of the KIC.

In addition, the Coordinator should attach the operational capacity evidence, including the relevant project references, and the self-compliance check table and the CVs of the key members of the Interim Management Team.

(Template B3 – Motivation and commitment letters)

The application should be presented in an orderly way, which is clear and easy to read.

6. Evaluation procedure and criteria (admissibility, eligibility, exclusion, selection and award criteria)

Following the deadline of the EIT Call for Proposals, admissibility, eligibility, exclusion and selection criteria checks will be performed for each proposal.

¹³ In case an umbrella organisation applies as a member of consortium, its relevance and contribution will be evaluated based on the organisation itself and its statutory activities as opposed of that of its members.



6.1 Admissibility criteria

Prior to the evaluation, proposals will be examined for compliance with the following admissibility criteria:

- the proposal must be submitted electronically via the proposal submission system operated by the European Commission in accordance with the provisions of the [EU Financial Regulation](#) (Article 152(2));
- all mandatory parts of the proposal must have been completed;
- the proposal must be submitted by the Call deadline.

Only proposals satisfying all the admissibility criteria shall pass on to the eligibility criteria assessment stage.

Since the working language of the EIT is English, applicants are requested to submit the proposal in English. If the proposal is submitted in any other official language of the European Union, the EIT may ask for the English translation of the specific document from the applicant.

In addition, the proposal must be accessible and legible, otherwise the EIT may request the applicant to resubmit the application document.

6.2 Eligibility criteria

Following the admissibility check, only proposals complying with the following conditions will be considered eligible for further evaluation:

- the applying consortium must contain at least three independent partner organisations established in at least three different Member States;
- at least two thirds of the partner organisations forming the consortium are established in different Member States;
- the applying consortium includes at least one higher education institution, one research institution and one private company;
- the applying consortium shall not include the following entities that are part of a KIC under Partnership Agreement or a KIC under Memorandum of Cooperation:
 - KIC legal entity;
 - co-location centre;
 - other entities part of a KIC's legal/corporate structure¹⁴;
- the proposal must be submitted by a consortium containing a maximum of 50 partners.

Only proposals satisfying all the eligibility criteria shall pass on to the evaluation stage.

¹⁴ Such as KIC subsidiaries, foundations, associations, etc. The requirement does not exclude KIC partner organisations.



6.3 Exclusion criteria

Applicants will be excluded from participation in the Call and from the award if they are in one of the situations referred to in Articles 138(1) of the [EU Financial Regulation](#).

As evidence, the applicants (i.e. the Coordinator and all the proposed partners participating in the applicant consortium) will have to submit a declaration of honour on exclusion criteria and absence of conflict of interest. Following the designation decision, the winning consortium may be requested to submit recently issued evidence (e.g. registration and tax certificates, judicial records) in support of the declaration of honour, in accordance with Article 139 of the [EU Financial Regulation](#).

Only admissible and eligible proposals will be evaluated against the financial and operational capacity criteria.

6.4 Financial capacity criteria

At the proposal submission stage¹⁵, the Coordinator will be asked to confirm that the organisation has carried out a self-check of the financial capacity of the organisation through the financial self-check tool¹⁶ or has been covered by a financial viability check for an EU project for the last closed financial year.

The Coordinator's organisation will be subject to the financial capacity assessment if (and when) the winning consortium has been designated: the financial capacity check will be done at latest before the award of the start-up grant. The financial capacity will be assessed based on the financial viability check of the Coordinator's organisation¹⁷.

If, following the designation decision, the Coordinator's organisation's financial viability would be assessed as 'weak' or 'insufficient':

- the Coordinator has to step down from his role but can participate in any other; in this case, the applying consortium must put forward a solution, including the appointment of a new Coordinator and reassignment of the coordination tasks;
- the consortium's activities will be subject to additional monitoring and reporting based on an action plan;
- if no acceptable solution or action plan would be presented by the Coordinator, the KIC designation/start-up phase may be terminated, and the designated consortium may be cancelled.

¹⁵ This confirmation will be requested on the SEP system as part of the proposal submission forms.

¹⁶ <https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/lfv/lfvSimulation.do>

¹⁷ The organisation's financial viability will be assessed by checking that: it has sufficient liquidity – it is able to cover its short-term commitments, it is financially autonomous, it is solvent - capable of covering its medium and long-term commitments, it is profitable – by generating profits, or at least with self-financing capacity.



Following the provisions of Article 201(5) of the [EU Financial Regulation](#), public bodies, including Member State organisations, international organisations, or legal entities whose viability is guaranteed by a Member State or a Horizon Europe associated country, will be exempted from the financial capacity check.

6.5 Operational capacity criteria

1) The Coordinator's familiarity with the Call's theme and experience of coordinating and/or participating in international projects related to innovation, research and education (separately or together), as well as familiarity with the European Union's financial procedures, is proven through having:

- Participated in at least one project as a project consortium member or coordinator, where its project budget share exceeded EUR 3 million; and
- coordinated at least one project with at least two other partners (three in total) from at least three different European countries and from at least two sides of the Knowledge Triangle; and
- participated in at least two EU financed projects in the capacity of a project partner.

The Coordinator should provide references for the above required projects as evidence of its operational capacity (one project may meet several of the above criteria). The projects should have been successfully completed, the final implementation date of the projects should not be earlier than 30 June 2023, and the minimum budget of the projects should be higher than EUR 300.000 to make the reference eligible. All reference projects should be related to the relevant thematic area.

2) The capability and necessary experience of the key members of the Interim Management Team, namely the CEO (Chief Executive Officer), COO (Chief Operational Officer), Chief Financial Officer (CFO) are evidenced through them having:

- at least 7 years' managerial work experience relevant to the position of Interim CEO, Interim COO and Interim CFO (i.e. tasks in the Interim Management in case the consortium is designated);
- for the CEO 7 years, and for the COO 5 years' work experience in the Call's thematic field;
- at least 5 years' work experience in international public or private organisations, or international projects.

A curriculum vitae (maximum four pages) in the Europass format¹⁸ covering the related professional qualifications, the work experience in international environment and the managerial experience and relevant expertise shall be attached to the Coordinator's Motivation and Commitment Declaration.

Only proposals that pass the operational capacity verification will be evaluated by the external experts.

¹⁸ <https://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/en/documents/curriculum-vitae/templates-instructions>

6.6 Technical evaluation criteria

Further to the Horizon Europe criteria requirements¹⁹, the following EIT specific technical evaluation criteria will be applied:

Table 2 – Technical evaluation criteria

EXCELLENCE 40 points max.	QUALITY & EFFICIENCY OF IMPLEMENTATION 30 points max.	IMPACT 30 points max.
TOTAL 100 points		
<p>1.1 STRATEGIC APPROACH</p> <p>Relevance and added value of the strategic approach in addressing the Water, Marine and Maritime Sectors and Ecosystems societal challenge in an integrated manner within the selected thematic focus areas with the highest innovation and commercialisation potential.</p> <p>Effective application of the EIT KIC innovation model under a business-oriented approach and quality of the proposed intervention logic to tackle the societal challenge by integrating entrepreneurship and skills education, innovation and business creation/acceleration (Knowledge Triangle integration).</p> <p>Added value and excellence is demonstrated in each activity area, as well as there is a strategy in place to build on and upscale innovative solutions developed under existing programmes and initiatives such as</p>	<p>2.1. KIC GOVERNANCE AND OPERATIONAL SET-UP</p> <p>Effectiveness of the proposed KIC's governance and management model, including selection and connectivity of co-location centres and demonstration how the knowledge triangle integration approach will be implemented at the operational level. This should also include clear reference to how the EIT Regional Innovation Scheme is integrated.</p> <p>Suitability of the proposed KIC's governance and operational set-up (incl. proposed profiles, talent acquisition and management) to deliver KIC's commercial side of activities and distribute and control the EIT grant.</p> <p>[15 points max] [0- 5 points; weighting: 3]</p>	<p>3.1 IMPACT</p> <p>Ambition and feasibility of the planned pan-European impact, incl. in EIT RIS eligible countries, in line with the EIT Impact Framework for each of the following impact pathways, demonstrated by relevant KPIs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - societal impact relevant to the Water, Marine and Maritime Sectors and Ecosystems societal challenge; - technological/ economic/ innovation impact by influencing the creation and growth of companies, creating new innovative solutions, supporting the uptake, commercialisation and deployment of innovative solutions at scale, creating direct and indirect jobs and mobilising additional public and private investments;

¹⁹ Article 28 Horizon Europe Regulation



EXCELLENCE 40 points max.	QUALITY & EFFICIENCY OF IMPLEMENTATION 30 points max.	IMPACT 30 points max.
<p>Horizon Europe, EU Missions and Horizon Europe partnerships.</p> <p><i>[20 points max]</i> [0-5 points; weighting: 4]</p> <p>1.2 PARTNERSHIP AND INNOVATION POTENTIAL</p> <p>Potential of the consortium's composition to implement the future KIC's strategy, demonstrated by the combined quality and commitment of the partners (including SMEs), forming a diverse, complementary and balanced high-quality excellence-based partnership to improve the innovation capacity of local ecosystems and deliver the uptake and deployment of innovation at scale, incl. through the EIT Regional Innovation Scheme and demonstrated open and transparent partnership growth strategy.</p> <p>Relevance and specificity of the consortium's strategy to become a sustainable institutionalised European Partnership.</p> <p><i>[10 points max]</i> [0-5 points; weighting: 2]</p> <p>1.3 SYNERGIES</p> <p>Demonstrated added value and readiness to establish concrete</p>	<p>2.2 KIC BUSINESS MODEL AND FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY</p> <p>Feasibility of the future KIC's business model and financial plan to achieve financial sustainability based on diversified revenue streams, incl. revenues and return generating assets' creation, and attraction of public and private co-investments.</p> <p><i>[15 points max]</i> [0- 5 points; weighting: 3]</p>	<p>- educational impact by strengthening human capital and reducing skills gap in research and innovation in water, marine and maritime sectors, enhancing innovative and entrepreneurial skills both at individual and organisational levels.</p> <p><i>[20 points max]</i> [0-5 points; weighting: 4]</p> <p>3.2 COMMUNICATIONS AND OUTREACH</p> <p>Relevance and effectiveness of the proposed KIC's plans for communications and outreach including the contribution to the EIT Community brand identity, and consistent visibility of EU.</p> <p><i>[5 points max]</i> [0- 5 points; weighting: 1]</p> <p>3.3 DISSEMINATION OF RESULTS</p> <p>Relevance and effectiveness of plans for dissemination of results, valorisation of knowledge and especially management and exploitation of intellectual property, including sharing good practices within, among and beyond the KICs, across EU</p>



EXCELLENCE 40 points max.	QUALITY & EFFICIENCY OF IMPLEMENTATION 30 points max.	IMPACT 30 points max.
<p>synergies, cooperation mechanisms and complementarities, positioning of the future KIC within the landscape of other relevant public, private and third sector initiatives at EU and other levels, notably the EU Mission Restore our Ocean and Waters and relevant Horizon Europe partnerships, as well as other relevant KICs.</p> <p><i>[10 points max]</i></p> <p>[0- 5 points; weighting: 2]</p>		<p>Member States, regions and local stakeholders and institutions to maximise the take-up of the new knowledge, both for commercial purposes and for policy making.</p> <p><i>[5 points max]</i></p> <p>[0- 5 points; weighting: 1]</p>

6.7 Hearing with the EIT Governing Board and designation of the EIT KIC

Following the approval of the evaluation results by the EIT Governing Board, the representatives of those proposals reaching the threshold of 70% points at the Panel of Experts evaluation stage will be invited to a hearing of the EIT Governing Board.

At the evaluation stage of the Governing Board Hearing, the overall strategic rationality and consistency of the EIT KIC model presented in the proposal, as well as the proposed interim team's readiness for the KIC start-up phase will be assessed. This will be done by evaluating the proposals from a holistic perspective against the three main criteria: Excellence, Quality & Efficiency of Implementation and Impact. In particular, the aspects shown in table 2 are key to the effective implementation of the EIT KIC model and will be assessed:

Table 3 – Evaluation criteria for Hearing with the EIT Governing Board

EXCELLENCE 10 points max.	QUALITY & EFFICIENCY OF IMPLEMENTATION 10 points max.	IMPACT 10 points max.
TOTAL 30 points		
Potential for excellence of the proposed KIC's strategic approach in terms of addressing the Water,	Feasibility of the proposed KIC governance and operational model and its plan towards	Consistency of the proposal in relation to potential and feasibility to achieve a significant



EXCELLENCE 10 points max.	QUALITY & EFFICIENCY OF IMPLEMENTATION 10 points max.	IMPACT 10 points max.
Marine and Maritime Sectors and Ecosystems societal challenge in an integrated manner, innovation potential, commercial and financial sustainability and start-up creation success, and contribution to the EIT's strategic objectives. [0- 5 points; weighting: 2]	financial sustainability, taking into account lessons learnt from current KICs. Feasibility and quality of the plan for the management (incl. interim team) of the KIC start-up phase. [0- 5 points; weighting: 2]	measurable and sustainable systemic impact in line with the EIT's overall objectives and EIT Impact Framework. [0- 5 points; weighting: 2]

The Governing Board's score will be calculated as the average of the individual scores of the Governing Board members. The sum of the points from the Governing Board Hearing will be added to the points obtained at the technical evaluation stage (Panel of Experts stage). The proposal receiving the highest number of points out of the maximum of 130 points can be designated by the EIT Governing Board. The EIT GB can designate one applicant and may establish a reserve list with one applicant.

6.8 Information for applicants

The applicants are invited to send in any questions they might have on the EIT Call for Proposals until **2 June 2025 via the following functional mailbox: EIT-KICs-Call-2025@eit.europa.eu**. Replies will be given until **10 June 2025**.

All questions together with their answers will be published on the [EIT Call page](#) on the EIT website. It is therefore strongly recommended that applicants regularly check the above-mentioned website.

With a view to equal treatment, EIT Governing Board members and EIT staff cannot give prior opinion on the admissibility, eligibility, quality or any other relevant element of a specific proposal.

Following the KIC designation by the EIT Governing Board, **all applicants will receive written feedback** on the evaluation of their proposals. Letters to unsuccessful applicants will state the name of the successful applicant and the grounds on which the decision was taken.

6.9 Informing the public about the final result

The EIT will publish the results of the 2025 Call for Proposals on its website.



7 Legal and financial provisions

7.1 Procedure for complaints and appeal

7.1.1 Evaluation review procedure:

In accordance with Article 30 of the Horizon Europe Regulation, an applicant may request an evaluation review if it considers that the applicable evaluation procedure has not been correctly applied to its proposal.

Only the procedural aspects of an evaluation may be the subject of a request for an evaluation review. The evaluation of the merits of a proposal shall not be the subject of an evaluation review.

Applicants must base their complaint on the information included in the letter addressed to them stating the grounds on which the decision was taken, possibly with reference to the conditions and criteria laid down in the Call for Proposals.

A request for redress, from the Coordinator and addressed to the EIT Director, may be submitted through the functional mailbox EIT-KICs-Call-2025@eit.europa.eu within **30 days** of the date on which the EIT informs the Coordinator of the evaluation results.

To be admissible, a complaint must:

- relate to a specific proposal;
- be received within 30 days after the communication of evaluation results;
- be submitted in writing;
- be submitted by the Coordinator of the original proposal identified as Participant 1 on the proposal application form (Part A).

An **evaluation review committee** shall provide an opinion on the procedural aspects of the evaluation and shall be chaired by and include staff of the relevant funding body and the Commission who were not involved in the evaluation of the proposals. The evaluation review committee may recommend one of the following:

- a) a re-evaluation of the proposal to be carried out primarily by evaluators who were not involved in the previous evaluation; or
- b) confirmation of the initial evaluation.

An evaluation review shall not delay the selection process for proposals that are not the subject of that review.

On the basis of the Committee's opinion, a decision will be taken by the EIT Director, and the Coordinator of the respective consortium will be notified in writing.



7.1.2 Lodging a complaint to the European Ombudsman:

Applicants who believe that there was a maladministration regarding the evaluation of their application may lodge a complaint to the European Ombudsman within **two years** of the date on which they became aware of the facts on which the complaint is based:

European Ombudsman

1 avenue du Président Robert Schuman

CS 30403 F-67001 Strasbourg Cedex

France

Tel.: (+33) 3 88 17 23 13 Fax: (+33) 3 88 17 90 62

Website: www.ombudsman.europa.eu

Contact form (for general inquiries): <http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/shortcuts/contacts.faces>

Complaint form (for launching a complaint):

<https://secure.ombudsman.europa.eu/atyourservice/secured/complaintform.faces>

7.1.3 Launching an action for annulment before the General Court of the European Union:

Applicants may lodge an action for annulment against the designation decision. This must be done within two months of receipt of the notification letter (see point 6.8). Any request for redress or any complaint for maladministration will have neither the purpose nor the effect of suspending the time-limit for lodging an action for annulment. The court responsible for hearing actions for annulment is the General Court:

General Court

Rue du Fort Niedergrünwald

L-2925 Luxembourg

Tel.: (352) 4303-1 Fax: (352) 4303 2100

E-mail: GeneralCourt.Registry@curia.europa.eu

URL: <http://curia.europa.eu>

7.2 Designation does not result in grant award

The designation of the winning consortium by the EIT Governing Board does not result in the award of a grant.

7.3 Start-up grant

The EIT may award a start-up grant of up to **EUR 5,000,000**, indicatively, to the designated partnership to cover activities for legal readiness, operational readiness and fostering EIT identity and other initial KIC activities to support the efficient setting up.



Therefore, shortly after the official notification of the designation decision of the EIT Governing Board, the designated consortium will be **invited to submit a Start-up Plan** within a short time following the designation decision.

The Start-up Plan will be evaluated by the EIT according to the following Horizon Europe award criteria: excellence, quality and efficiency of the implementation, and impact. An EIT evaluation committee will be appointed to assess the Start-up Plan and the start-up grant requested by the KIC. The **Start-up Grant Agreement** may be signed following the award decision of the EIT Director.

The start-up grant may cover the eligible costs of, inter alia, the following activities: establishment of legal structures, including the set-up of the KIC Legal Entity; recruitment and appointment of a CEO and other core staff; coordination and signature of the internal agreements formalising the engagement of partner organisations; setting up key business processes and establish internal policies; preparation of the first KIC Business Plan. In addition, when justified, the Start-up Grant Agreement may also finance some initial higher education, research and innovation, business creation, Cross-KIC and EIT RIS activities that directly contribute to the rolling out of the first KIC Business Plan.

7.4 Contractual relations between the EIT and the KICs

7.4.1 Start-up Grant Agreement

As explained under point 7.3 above, further to the award of the start-up grant, the EIT may sign a Start-up Grant Agreement (following the [Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement²⁰](#)) with the designated KIC in order to ensure financial support for the start-up phase.

The Start-up Grant Agreement is a multi-beneficiary grant agreement which will be concluded between the consortium submitting the proposal (represented by the Coordinator) and the EIT. The Start-up Grant Agreement will have the duration until the end of the start-up period (December 2026).

7.4.2 Partnership Agreement and Grant Agreement

The long-term cooperation between the EIT and each KIC will be formalised through a seven-year [Partnership Agreement](#), which will be concluded between the KIC (represented by the KIC Legal Entity) and the EIT. This agreement lays down provisions regarding the objectives of the KIC, KIC partnership rules and the internal roles and responsibilities within the KIC, and the most important principles regarding good governance, sound portfolio management, openness and transparency, KIC activities, monitoring and reporting, reviews and evaluations of the KIC. All provisions of the Partnership Agreement must be transposed in the KIC's legal and operational arrangements, including the agreements signed by the KIC Legal Entity with the KIC partners.

²⁰ The Start-up Grant Agreement will follow the HE Model Grant Agreement as Coordination and Support action (CSA).



The EIT intends to sign the Partnership Agreement with the designated KIC upon the successful completion of milestones during the start-up phase as approved by the EIT Governing Board.

The Partnership Agreement may be extended for an additional seven-year period in accordance with the provisions of the EIT Regulation, subject to a positive assessment and decision by the EIT Governing Board.

Within this framework, the EIT may award grants to a KIC formalised through annual or multiannual (i.e. up to three years) Grant Agreements (GA) which follow the [Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement](#). The EIT will make the funding allocation decisions, following the funding allocation principles adopted by the EIT Governing Board. Grants may be awarded separately in particular for Cross-KIC activities and shared services and the Higher Education Initiative action.

The model Partnership Agreement and the Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement are annexed to the Call.

7.4.3 Memorandum of Cooperation

Following the expiry of the Partnership Agreement - in case of a positive final evaluation - the EIT may decide to sign a [Memorandum of Cooperation](#) (MoC), aiming to keep the KIC as an active member of the EIT Community. The MoU includes the conditions for access to EIT competitive calls for some specific activities and transnational activities with a high Union added value.

7.5 Publicity

By the KIC:

In accordance with Article 8 of the Partnership Agreement and Article 17 of the Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement, the KIC must promote its activities and results, and must acknowledge the European Union's contribution in all publications or in conjunction with activities for which the grant is used. In this respect, the KIC is required to give prominence to the name and emblem of the EIT on all their publications, posters, programmes and other products realised in line with the EIT Community Brand Book. If this requirement is not fully complied with, the grant may be reduced in accordance with the provisions of the Grant Agreement.

By the EIT:

Annual ex-post publication: All information relating to grants awarded in the course of a financial year shall be published on the internet site of the EIT no later than 30 June of the year following the financial year in which the grants were awarded. The EIT will publish the name of the KIC, the subject of the grant, the amount awarded as well as a list of KIC Partners and their locality.



7.6 Gender equality and ethical principles

Gender equality and ethical principles shall be complied with in accordance with the provisions laid down in the Horizon Europe rules (see Annex 5 of the Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement).

7.7 Data protection

The reply to any call for proposals involves the recording and processing of personal data (such as name, address and CV). Such data will be processed pursuant to Regulation (EU) 2018/1725²¹ of 23 October 2018 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data by the Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Regulation (EC) No 45/2001 and Decision No 1247/2002/EC. Unless indicated otherwise, any personal data will be processed solely for evaluation purposes under the call for proposals the EIT acting as data controller. Details concerning the processing of your personal data are available in the privacy statement at: <https://eit.europa.eu/who-we-are/legal-framework/data-protection>.

If you would like to exercise your rights under Regulation (EU) 2018/1725, or if you have comments, questions or concerns, or if you would like to submit a complaint regarding the collection and use of your personal data, you can contact the data controller at EIT-KICs-Call-2025@eit.europa.eu by explicitly specifying your request. The tenderer's personal data may be registered in the Early Detection and Exclusion System (EDES) if the applicant is in one of the situations mentioned in Article 138 Financial Regulation. For more information, see the privacy statement on http://ec.europa.eu/budget/explained/management/protecting/protect_en.cfm).

²¹ OJ L 295, 21.11.2018, p. 39



ANNEXES

Documents for information

- a. [SIA factsheet on Water, Marine and Maritime Sectors and Ecosystems](#)
- b. [Commission Staff Working document on a Commission ex-ante analysis on the relevance of a new Knowledge and Innovation Community of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology on Water, Marine and Maritime Sectors and Ecosystems and confirming its launch in 2026](#)
- c. [Model Partnership Agreement](#)
- d. [Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement \(including the EIT specific provisions in Annex 5\)](#)
- e. [Memorandum of Cooperation](#)
- f. [EIT Governing Board Decision on EIT KPIs \(2021-2027\)](#) and EIT Simplified Impact Framework
- g. [RIS Implementation Framework \(2022-2027\)](#)
- h. [EIT Principles for financing, monitoring and evaluating KIC activities](#)
- i. [Privacy statement](#)
- j. [EIT Brand Book](#)

