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European Institute of Innovation & Technology



European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT)

Invitation for a 2026 Start-up Plan proposal for the EIT Water

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1 Introduction and background

1.1 Introduction

This is an invitation to submit a proposal for an EU action grant under the Horizon Europe Programme, European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT).

In the 2021-2027 period, the EIT, as part of the Horizon Europe (HE) Framework Programme for Research and Innovation[1], is governed by the EIT Regulation (recast)[2] and the EIT Strategic Innovation Agenda 2021-2027[3].

This invitation lays down the main conditions for the start-up grant for the Knowledge and Innovation Community (KIC) 'EIT Water'. More details on the action, the timeline, the eligible entities, eligible activities, and the evaluation process can be found below.

Therefore, we invite you to read the **call documentation** carefully, and in particular this invitation, the Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement, the EU Funding & Tenders Portal Online Manual, the Horizon Europe Guidelines and the EU Grants AGA — Annotated Grant Agreement, and the Partnership Agreement (PA).

1.2 Background

In accordance with the conditions laid down in the 2025 Call for Proposals[4], on 11 November 2025 the EIT Governing Board designated the consortium AllWaters, proposal number 101261262, as the new KIC called 'EIT Water'[5] ('KIC').

Further to the Final EIT Single Programming Document 2025-2027[6], the **EIT may award a start-up grant to the designated EIT Water in order to support the efficient setting up of the new KIC.** The purpose of

[1] 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) 1290/2013 and (EU) No 1291/2013 (OJ L 170, 12.5.2021, p. 1.)

[2] Regulation (EU) 2021/819 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 on the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (recast) (OJ L 189, 28.5.2021, p. 61)

[3] Decision (EU) 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 (OJ L 189, 28.5.2021, p. 91)

[4] https://www.eit.europa.eu/library/eit-call-proposals-2025-new-kic-water-marine-and-maritime-sectors-and-ecosystems-eit-water

[5] Decision 21/2025 of the EIT Governing Board of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology of 11 November 2025 on the designation of the Knowledge and Innovation Community (KIC) in the Water, Marine and Maritime Sectors and Ecosystems, ref. Ares(2025)9722755

[6] Decision 36/2024 of the EIT Governing Board on the adoption of the Final Single Programming Document (2025-2027) of the EIT, ref. Ares(2024)9134718

the grant is to cover activities described in the Start-up Plan grouped in four main blocks – EIT Water Strategy, governance set-up, operational set-up, and fostering EIT identity — for the efficient setting up of the KIC, as well as other initial KIC activities (if applicable).

The designated consortium shall submit the proposal for their Start-up Plan and the estimated budget in accordance with the conditions laid down in the present invitation. Then, the Start-up Plan will be evaluated according to the criteria defined in this invitation; and as a result, the EIT may conclude a **Start-Up Grant Agreement** with the designated consortium.

A successful completion of the start-up phase is a pre-condition for the signature of the 7-year Partnership Agreement with the EIT. Therefore, if the designated consortium fails to demonstrate the successful achievement of the main milestones of the start-up phase by the end of 2026, the EIT Governing Boad may decide not to endorse the start-up phase.

2 Topic of the invitation, the objectives, milestones and deliverables of the start-up grant

2.1 Topic of the invitation

This invitation covers the following topic:

Type of Action (ToA)	Topic	Call identifier
Coordination and Support Action (CSA)	2026 Start-up Plan and estimated budget for the Knowledge and Innovation Community (KIC) EIT Water	HORIZON-EIT-2025-STARTUP-IBA

2.2 The objectives, milestones and deliverables of the start-up grant

The objective of the start-up grant is to contribute to the legal and operational framework of the new KIC during its start-up phase. The start-up activities shall be described in the Start-up Plan, which is the fundamental part of the SUGA. In addition to the main milestones and deliverables, the Start-up Plan also has to address shortcomings and/or weaknesses identified in the KIC proposal (based on the evaluation process by the independent external experts and the hearing with the EIT Governing Board).

The start-up plan and its milestones and deliverables must build on the originally submitted and evaluated 'AllWaters' proposal. Any changes proposed by the consortium should not be to the detriment of the quality of the 'AllWaters' proposal.

2.2.1 Set-up of the KIC governance, legal and operational framework

As stipulated in Article 7(2) of the EIT Regulation, KICs have a substantial autonomy in defining their internal organisation and composition, as well as their agenda and working methods, provided that they

result in progress towards achieving the objectives of the EIT and the KICs, while taking into account the strategic planning of Horizon Europe and the strategic direction of the EIT set out in the EIT Strategic Innovation Agenda 2021-2027 and by the Governing Board. Notwithstanding the principle of autonomy, while designing its legal and operational framework, the KIC should comply with the **good governance, openness and transparency principles** laid down in Articles 6.1 and 7.2 of the model Partnership Agreement.

As described in the 2025 Call for KICs, within the framework of the Horizon Europe Regulation, KICs are operating as Institutionalised European Partnerships, and as such must adhere to the principles of Union added value, transparency and openness, and to having impact within and for Europe, strong leverage effect on sufficient scale, long-term commitments of all involved parties, flexibility in implementation, coherence, coordination and complementarity with Union, local, regional, national and, where relevant, international initiatives or other European Partnerships and missions.[7]

As it kicks-off, the start-up consortium must develop and submit to the EIT a proposal of the KIC (corporate) governance model including the KIC Legal Entity (KIC LE) and the Co-location Centres (CLCs). Following the EIT's approval of the proposed model, the consortium shall proceed with setting up the model. To this end, the consortium should establish and register a KIC LE in one of the EU Member States and set up a KIC Supervisory Board, led by an independent chair. The Supervisory Board must reflect diversity, in particular with regard to gender, geographical and professional background. The KIC shall also include representatives from the finance sector (e.g. VC) and ensure representation of SMEs.

In parallel, the consortium should establish its Co-location Centres (CLCs). CLC should be kept to a manageable number, especially in the early years of the KIC. Based on the lessons learnt, EIT strongly recommends that CLCs are set up as branches as this helps ensure lean, cost-efficient and effective governance and implementation.

The core principles to be observed while setting up these structures are governed by the model Partnership Agreement, and the compliance with these principles is assessed by the EIT following a pre-defined methodology. This methodology will be shared with the consortium at the kick-off meeting. The annotated list of milestones and respective principles to be observed, including deadlines, are further detailed in the List of Milestones (section 2.2.2.).

At the start-up phase, the KIC LE and KIC partners must create an effective operational structure ensuring that the KIC management has executive power to implement the KIC Strategic Agenda and KIC Business Plans. The KIC management and supervisory bodies must act in the best interest of the KIC, safeguarding its goals, mission and identity, independently from particular interests of individual KIC partners.

The EIT Director will sign the Partnership Agreement under the condition of successful completion of the start-up phase (based on a positive assessment by the EIT) and the endorsement of the main milestones of the start-up phase by the EIT Governing Board in Q4 of 2026. The endorsement of the EIT Governing Board will be mainly based on the successful achievement of the below listed milestones and main deliverables.

[7] Horizon Europe Regulation, Annex III, point 2

2.2.2 Start-up Plan milestones and deliverables

The designated consortium must set up a KIC and reach the milestones and deliverables requested below:

Milestones	Main Deliverables	Deadlines	Good governance principles and further requirements to be observed
Objective 1: EIT Water Strategy			
KIC Strategic Agenda 2027-2033	First draft of the KIC Strategic Agenda (PA Annex 1) Final KIC Strategic Agenda approved by KIC and EIT	**30 April 2026** **31 August 2026**	
	Value proposition and membership model	**30 April 2026 (draft)** **31 August 2026 (final)**	The KIC shall be open to new partners by raising awareness among stakeholders and encouraging their participation, and remain open during its lifetime. The KIC should develop clear and objective criteria to become a partner, partners' accession and exit procedure, respecting the principles of equal treatment and non-discrimination. The exit procedure must include a formal notification (with specific feedback) to organisations not accepted to enter the KIC. The process must include an assessment stage (added value of potential partner) and a provision to request

			feedback (from partners leaving the KIC). The KIC should reflect diversity in its composition, in particular the balance within the knowledge triangle. All sides of the knowledge triangle in the composition of the KIC partnership should be represented adequately, minimum 10% of one side.
	Financial sustainability strategy	30 April 2026 (draft) 31 August 2026 (final)	
Objective 2: KIC Corporate Governance set-up			
Proposal for KIC corporate governance model including the KIC LE and the CLCs	Proposal on the KIC corporate governance model, including the KIC LE and the CLCs, submitted to the EIT for endorsement	28 February 2026	The proposal should demonstrate how the corporate governance model will facilitate KIC operations (membership + portfolio selection and grant distribution + commercial activities) in a business-driven fashion, ensuring effective oversight over the entire KIC. To this end, the consortium should build on other KICs' experience, as well as follow the good governance principles as per Article 6.1 of the Partnership Agreement, with a particular emphasis on the following points: - separate ownership and membership from operational management - separate the supervisory functions from the operations - separate the decisions on activities, on KIC funding schemes and distribution of funding from their implementation - have an effective supervision or ownership over the

			entities with a CLC role. The governance model should be designed having regard to the overarching principles that the KIC must act in the EU public interest and be financially sustainable. In addition, in view of the principles of sound portfolio management, the governance model shall ensure avoidance of conflict of interest in case of strategic decisions concerning funding.
Set up of KIC Legal Entity (LE) Set-up of the Co-location Centres (CLC)	Extract from the registry of the place of establishment of the KIC LE. Extracts from the registries of the place of establishment of CLCs or equivalent in case the CLCs are set up as branches. Articles of Association / Statutes and bylaws for KIC LE and CLCs or equivalent in case the CLCs are set up as branches. KIC organigramme	**31 May 2026** (KIC LE to be set up) **31 August 2026** (minimum 3 CLCs to be set-up and KIC organigram) **31 December 2026** (all CLCs to be set-up)	According to the good governance principles laid down in the model Partnership Agreement, KIC LE should establish an effective supervision or ownership over the entities with a CLC role. Based on lessons learnt, this should be ensured by means of full ownership of the CLCs by the KIC LE; or by establishing the CLCs as branches. The KIC LE should have rights and/or contracts in place that confer decisive influence on the composition, voting or decisions of the CLC in all strategic KIC matters and obligations foreseen in the EIT legal framework and the model Partnership Agreement. The KIC should have a size which allows the KIC to function in an effective and efficient way, hence the KIC organigramme should have a strong link to KIC Strategic Agenda.
Set up of KIC LE Supervisory Board and selection of Supervisory Board	The principle of at least 50% of independent members shall be	**31 August 2026**	KIC LE should ensure that at least half of the members, ideally more, — including the Chairperson — of the

members, including the chairperson	laid down in the founding acts / bylaws of the KIC LE, as well as a definition of independence, including a cooling-off period of at least 2 years should be stipulated therein (following the requirements of the EIT Code of Conduct model).		body with supervisory functions are independent from the KIC partners (please refer to the EIT Code of Conduct model regarding the requirements for "independence"). The KIC should separate the supervisory functions from the operations, i.e., no operational role should be taken over by the Supervisory Board of the KIC LE. In the case of strategic decisions concerning funding, attention shall be paid to avoidance of conflict of interest. C-level staff (e.g., CEO/COO/CFO), CLC Directors and Thematic Directors should not be part of the Supervisory Board of the KIC LE. The KIC LE Supervisory Board should reflect diversity, in particular, with regard to gender, geographical, and professional background. In practical terms this means that at least 25% of the members should be of a less represented gender. All sides of the knowledge triangle should be represented adequately, minimum 10% of one side. Representatives from the EIT RIS countries should take at least 20% of seats in the Supervisory Board. Representatives from one country should not take more than 33% of seats in the Supervisory Board.
Ensuring participation of KIC partners in the KIC LE organisation	Final agreement template(s) and/or equivalent document(s) concerning the participation of	30 June 2026	The KIC LE must ensure that, within the scope of the KIC Strategic Agenda, KIC partners act in the best interest of the KIC, safeguarding its goals, mission and identity.

	KIC partners in the KIC LE organisation and their commitment. List of partners participating in the KIC LE, or equivalent: - at least 30 KIC partners - remaining KIC partners	30 September 2026 31 December 2026	As a European Partnership, the KIC shall ensure the commitments, for financial and/or in-kind contributions, from each partner throughout the duration of the initiative. To this end, the agreements with KIC partners should include a clear obligation to comply with the principles laid down in the model Partnership Agreement, including the obligation to act in the best interest of the KIC, safeguarding its goals, mission and identity.
Endorsement of Partnership Agreement by KIC partners	Minutes from the KIC Partner Assembly (or equivalent body) proving the endorsement of the Partnership Agreement by at least 30 KIC partners	30 September 2026	
Completion of the KIC's legal and operational arrangements	Provisions of the Partnership Agreement is transposed in the KIC's legal and operational arrangements, including at CLC level	31 December 2026	All provisions of the Partnership Agreement must be transposed in the KIC's legal and operational arrangements, including the agreements signed by the KIC LE with the KIC partners. The KIC LE must notify the EIT of these arrangements (in particular, by sharing the relevant documents with the EIT), and any substantial modifications to them.
Objective 3: KIC Operational set-up			
Recruitment, retention and staff development plan	Recruitment, retention and staff development plan	31 March 2026	The KIC must have an effective operational structure to implement the KIC Strategic Agenda and the KIC Business Plans. By extension, this also includes recruiting staff with

			appropriate experience and skills, as well as providing training and development opportunities to KIC staff.
Selection and recruitment of permanent CEO	Recruitment of the permanent CEO Signed employment contract and effective assumption of the CEO duties	31 May 2026 31 July 2026 (conditional to the EIT Governing Board endorsement)	The recruitment process should be transparent and independent. KIC should separate ownership and membership from operational management, i.e. the CEO should not have a link to KIC partners.
Selection and recruitment of permanent KIC core staff (COO, CFO, Thematic Directors) Selection and recruitment of CLC managers	Recruitment of the COO, CFO and Thematic Directors Signed employment contracts and effective assumption of the duties Recruitment of the CLC managers	30 September 2026 31 December 2026 31 December 2026	The recruitment process should be transparent and independent. KIC should separate ownership and membership from operational management, i.e. COO/CFO, CLC Directors and Thematic Directors should not have a link to KIC partners. The KIC management team should reflect diversity, in particular with regard to gender, geographical and professional background. In practical terms this means that at least 25% of members should be of the less represented gender. Representatives from one country should not take more than 33% of the management.
Set up of operational functions at the KIC LE level	Declaration of readiness of accounting system of KIC LE	30 November 2026	The KIC has set clear priorities, the reporting lines and decision-making authority are clearly defined, operational procedures and quality control procedures are in place.
Development of monitoring and	Monitoring and reporting	31 December 2026	KIC has a performance measurement and monitoring

reporting system	system designed and initial implementation started		framework in place at KIC LE and CLC levels to track the attainment of the KIC Strategic Agenda and Business Plans. The KIC has set clear priorities, the reporting lines and decision-making authority are clearly defined, operational procedures and quality control procedures are in place.
KIC Business Plan 2027-2028	KIC Business Plan submitted to the EIT	**September 2026** Exact date specified in the Invitation for Business Plan	The KIC should ensure a high degree of openness when managing KIC funding schemes, including openness of calls for projects to non-KIC partners.
Development of the KIC's Control Strategy and relevant policies	KIC's Control Strategy submitted to the EIT	**31 December 2026**	Sound portfolio management principles as laid down in Article 6.1 of the model PA and the EIT specific provisions in Annex 5 of the Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement.
	Call management manual (internal) Handbook on project implementation (external)	**Before launch of first KIC calls but no later than 31 December 2026**	Project selection and grant distribution procedures in line with the provisions of the Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement Annex 5 (incl. based on the Annex 5 Annotations, the EIT call template, sub-grant agreement template, direct award checklist)
	KIC's IP Policy	**31 December 2026**	
	Procurement Policy submitted and is in line with the EIT Procurement Guidelines	**31 December 2026**	

	KIC's Gender Mainstreaming Policy	31 December 2026	
	KIC Code of Conduct based on the Model Code of Conduct provided by the EIT	30 June 2026	
	Anti-Fraud Strategy	30 June 2026	
Objective 4: Fostering EIT identity			
Development of the KIC's communication policy contributing to the EIT visibility and identity and considering the EIT Community Brand Book	KIC's communication strategy and plan	31 August 2026	
	EIT Water Launch event	To be proposed by EIT Water consortium and defined in consultation with EIT	

2.2.3 KIC Strategic Agenda

The start-up consortium will have to develop the **KIC Strategic Agenda (SA) 2027-2033**. This strategic document will serve as the basis for its activities set out in its Business Plans through the years 2027-2028. To this end, the KIC Strategic Agenda should present KIC's vision, mission and strategic objectives, as well as KIC's governance and operation model and expected results and impact to be achieved by 2033. The strategic objectives and targets should be designed according to the SMART methodology and closely reflect the EIT's own strategic objectives as outlined in the EIT Regulation (recast) and the EIT Strategic Innovation Agenda 2021-2027, including the proposed objective to strengthen the innovation capacity and entrepreneurship of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

As such, the KIC Strategic Agenda is an overarching document and shall cover all KIC activities managed as part of the KIC portfolio and coordinated by the KIC LE and CLCs, regardless of the EIT funding. The Strategic Agenda includes the financial sustainability strategy, value proposition[8] and membership model, as well impact and the respective indicators and KPI targets.

When preparing the KIC Strategic Agenda, the start-up consortium should consider and address feedback and recommendations received for the proposal submitted in the 2025 Call for KIC, as well as the conditions and recommendations set by the EIT Governing Board (if applicable).

Against the backdrop of ongoing preparations for the next Framework Programme, the consortium shall build on to the EIT Governing Board Vision Paper, including the New KIC Target Model[9].

The draft KIC Strategic Agenda will be reviewed by the EIT and its final version of will be approved by the EIT.

(Please note that following the adoption of the next Framework Programme and the EIT legal framework 2028-2034, the KIC Strategic Agenda will have to be aligned, as necessary.)

2.2.4 Knowledge Triangle Integration activities

As part of its mandate, the EIT has pioneered the integration of the 'knowledge triangle' (business, higher education and research) and has gradually established itself as a unique instrument addressing societal challenges. This focus on societal challenges through the integration of the knowledge triangle is a distinctive feature of the EIT model compared with other innovation instruments.

Knowledge triangle integration happens when entrepreneurial, innovation and education processes and activities are interlinked and integrated. Through this coordinated process, the EIT Community inspires, facilitates and empowers innovators with diverse skills and competences to:

[8] The award of the EIT grant cannot be considered among the elements of the value proposition.

[9] https://www.eit.europa.eu/news-events/news/eit-governing-board-sharpens-strategic-vision-new-kic-model-and-proposals

- equip students and lifelong learners with the skills to become entrepreneurs;
- deliver new products, services and business models;
- create start-ups and accelerate the scaling up of ventures.

Implementation of the knowledge triangle integration model requires representatives of the full spectrum of partners to enter a process of strategic thinking to embed this within the KIC's operations and activities. They must produce a clear set of goals and objectives, along with pathways to achieve them. Partners need to be fully committed and willing to adjust their own operations to better integrate with the other sides of the knowledge triangle.

EIT entrepreneurial education and skills development

The EIT makes higher education an integral component of a comprehensive innovation strategy. As such, the EIT fosters entrepreneurship in its higher education and R&I activities by promoting excellent entrepreneurial education and skills development programmes. The entire EIT Community education offering comes together as part of the EIT Campus and EIT education and training activities to.

Innovation projects

Innovation is at the heart of all the EIT's activities and the EIT model is well positioned to reduce fragmentation and to encourage activities that would otherwise not develop, for reasons of market, systems and orientation failure. EIT KICs bring facilitation and networking competences that accelerate innovation development, resulting in the effective commercialisation of research results in cutting-edge innovation projects. Through their pan-European networks, EIT KICs link innovation stakeholders from specific environments and sectors with others. They help spread the dynamics of established ecosystems across Europe and connect otherwise isolated pockets of excellence with each other.

Business creation

The EIT empowers entrepreneurs and innovators across Europe and beyond to turn their best ideas into products, services and jobs. Indeed, creating more innovation and more jobs through fast-growing, innovative firms is one of the EU's key innovation objectives. As such, a cornerstone of the EIT's activities is to support innovation in existing companies and the creation of new business opportunities.

The vital ingredients in fostering entrepreneurial activities are ensuring access to finance, new customers and new markets, along with providing support for enhancing business skills. Through their business creation and acceleration programmes, all EIT KICs offer a range of business support services that help entrepreneurs and innovators translate their ideas into successful, thriving ventures. These services focus on areas such as support for technology, market assessment, access to human resources, access to new markets and customers, mentoring and seed and venture capital through specific KIC innovation funds and investor networks.

2.2.5 KIC Financial Sustainability Strategy

One of the key features of a KIC is that it must become financially sustainable within a period of 7 to 15 years after its designation. 'Financial sustainability' means the capacity of a KIC to finance its knowledge triangle activities independently from EIT contributions, as stipulated in Article 2(16) of the EIT Regulation (recast). Hence, from the very start, a KIC is expected to have a strong business logic and mindset aiming to build assets and generate revenues from its activities, and include mechanisms to ensure their sustainability over time.

In this context, the KIC will have to develop and implement revenue-creating strategies, in order to maintain its innovation ecosystem and the knowledge triangle activities beyond the period in which the EIT provides financial support through grant agreements. To this end, it is also expected that industry, finance and service sectors contribute significantly to the KIC's budget. All revenues (e.g. donations, public grants, etc.) solely must be used for the purpose of achieving KIC Strategic Agenda objectives and targets. This principle should be properly transposed in the KIC's legal and operational framework.

The long-term elements of the financial sustainability strategy shall be included in the KIC Strategic Agenda, while the short-term (annual, bi- or triannual) tasks shall be included in the KIC Business Plans with relevant targets, indicators and sources of verification that allow for tracking progress.

More explanations can be found in Decision 06/2022 of the EIT Governing Board on the financial sustainability principles.

2.2.6 Interim management team and handover to the permanent management team

During the stat-up phase, the interim management team should be lean and limited to three C-level positions. Further hirings may take place once the KIC Strategic Agenda and KIC organigramme are designed and approved by EIT.

One of the main objectives of the start-up phase is to **select and recruit permanent KIC staff** (i.e., the KIC CEO and KIC core staff) and to ensure **handover of the management tasks from the interim management team to a permanent management team**.

The intensity and efficiency necessary for the handover process between the KIC interim team and the KIC permanent team should not be underestimated, in particular, because the transition to the new team occurs during a crucial period of the start-up phase in which the deadlines laid down in this invitation should be met. The start-up phase coordinator should remain active throughout the duration of Start-up Plan implementation and support the handover process.

To this end, the Start-up Plan should include provisions to ensure the successful handover of the tasks:

- The selection and recruitment committee of the KIC and any external support for the recruitment (e.g. an external recruitment agency, if applicable), should be well informed about the particularities of the EIT model and KICs as organisations; a briefing session for the committee is strongly recommended.
- The vacancy notices, their open publication and in particular the criteria for selecting the permanent KIC CEO and the permanent KIC core staff should be well defined with the EIT support, in order to ensure that the permanent staff will have the necessary knowledge and capacity to

assure business continuity from the start-up phase coordinator during the start-up period and implementation of the first Business Plan of the KIC.

According to the EIT good governance principles, KIC management team must reflect diversity, in particular with regard to gender, geographical and professional background. KIC should apply this principle when hiring management team members, as well as CLC Directors.

EIT will share with the consortium the "Guiding principles for recruiting C-level management and Supervisory Board members".

2.2.7 KIC talent acquisition and management

To deliver on KIC's commercial side of activities and distribute and control the EIT grant, the KIC should pay a particular attention to talent management and finding the right people for the diverse profiles required to deliver on the KIC's strategy. EIT Water should hire professionals with key skills, including sector knowledge, a business mindset and experience in impact investment and asset management. The KIC also builds a strong project management office composed of professionals in EU and Horizon Europe funding, project management and reporting. The KIC should also foresee continuous professional training and development opportunities to KIC staff.

2.2.8 Preparation of KIC Business Plan 2027-2028

In Q2 2026, the EIT will launch the Invitation for Business Plan 2027-2028 of EIT Water. The invitation, including the Invitation text and the additional guidance will be shared with the KIC in due time.

The KIC, in its Business Plan 2027-2028 proposal, among others, will describe its activities at portfolio level for two years, its approach of its activities' selection, i.e. KIC calls for projects, in line with the transparency and openness requirements, and it will set out its impacts and KPIs to be achieved. The KIC Business Plan shall be aligned with the KIC Strategic Agenda and the framework of the EIT Strategic Agenda 2021-2027.

The deadline for submission of the Business Plan 2027-2028 will be in Q3-Q4 2026. The proposed Business Plan will then be subject to evaluation by external experts and the EIT and, followed by a hearing in Q4 2026 with the EIT Governing Board, the financial allocation decision will be adopted by the Governing Board.

The exact opening and submission dates of the KIC Business Plan proposal will be communicated in due time. The start of implementation of the Business Plan 2027-2028 will be 1 January 2027 and will end on 31 December 2028.

2.2.8.1 Portfolio and cascade funding model

Taking into account that the KIC will enter into multi-annual grant agreements with the EIT, the two main characteristics of the future Business Plans are the description of the activities at portfolio level and the cascaded funding model.

Portfolio approach:

The information in the future Business Plans will be provided at portfolio level providing an overview of all activities to be implemented, including budgets and impact targets measured through key performance indicators, whilst specific details about each project will be collected regularly during implementation in line with a pre-defined data set.

The portfolio description will also indicate how the KIC will respect the principles that need to be complied with when selecting projects and recipients for EIT funding (e.g., principles of sound financial management, financial sustainability, good governance, openness and transparency, avoidance of conflict of interests etc.). An essential component of this approach is monitoring relying on the data delivered by all the KICs' IT tools to ensure that the necessary information is collected for business intelligence and assurance purposes.

Cascade funding model:

Cascade funding model, called as Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) under the EU Financial Regulation[10] also known and "sub-granting", is a commonly used mechanism to implement activities under EU funding. It means that the implementation of the portfolio of activities is cascaded by the beneficiary to further recipients of the EU grant via calls. In 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.

Translating the model into the EIT context, the beneficiary of the future grant agreements will be only the KIC LE (acting such as a 'consortium leader' in other programmes) and CLCs, while KIC partners will be recipients of FSTP and are not acceding directly to the grant agreement.

Nevertheless, KIC partners will participate in the implementation of the KIC Business Plan, and they will contribute to delivery of the impact as well as financial sustainability of the KIC. Sub-grants must be awarded based on clear and transparent criteria that are to be outlined in the KIC Business Plan.

2.2.8.2 KIC Control Strategy

Similar to all the other KICs, the new KIC must have an effective and reliable Control Strategy in place, in line with the provisions of Annex 5 of the HE Model Grant Agreement. The KIC's Control Strategy shall be developed during the start-up phase to be ready for the implementation by the first Business Plan. Further guidance will be provided by the EIT.

2.2.8.3 Data model and IT tools

eGrants

EIT and KICs will use the eGrants IT system for the purpose of grant management, therefore proposal submission, grant agreement signature and reporting will be managed via this tool. Each KIC should submit the data in the agreed format through a portfolio approach via proposal and reporting templates

[10] 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)

into the eGrants platform. Additionally, throughout the grant agreement implementation, each KIC will need to collect and import additional data (e.g. project, partner, proposal, FS, Impact etc.) directly to EIT IT Portal. All data from the EIT Portal will be transferred to *CORDA - European Union's data warehouse* feeding *eCORDA* (accessible by member state representatives) and Horizon Dashboard – publicly accessible through any web browser.

By using CORDA, the EIT will ensure it meets the standards of Horizon Europe with respect to transparency and openness.

EIT IT Portal:

While eGrants is a European Commission grant management tool used for selection, signature and reporting on grant agreements between KICs and the EIT, **the EIT IT Portal is used to collect additional, more granular data relevant for assessment/monitoring, analysis guiding strategic decision-making but also for statistical purposes and business intelligence.** This collection should include data on KIC performance (Impact indicators, KPIs, FS etc.), KIC calls (call calendar, call text, call evaluation outcome) but also data proposals submitted to KIC calls and sub-granted projects/participants to allow for monitoring of EIT grant consumption (e.g. per Area, country etc).

2.2.9 KIC IP policy

The designated consortium shall prepare and adopt the KIC IP policy during the start-up year. The IP policy shall comply with the relevant rules laid down in the HE Model Grant Agreement (see Article 16 and Annex 5 thereof).

2.2.10 KIC Procurement policy

During the start-up phase, the consortium will have to develop and adopt its procurement policy, based on the EIT Procurement Guidelines. The procurement policy will have to be applied by the KIC LE and CLCs.

In accordance with Article 6.1(c) of the Partnership Agreement, the KIC LE and CLCs must have a Procurement Policy in place to ensure compliance with the substantive requirements of EU public procurement law, in particular with the main principles of transparency, equal treatment, non-discrimination and competition.

The KIC procurement policy should be published on the KIC's website.

2.2.11 KIC Gender Mainstreaming Policy

One of the milestones to be reached is the development of the KIC Gender Mainstreaming Policy. The Policy is a strategic view with a longer-term outlook aimed at achieving gender equality in the KIC. The aim of the Gender Mainstreaming Policy is to outline the KIC's general goals, objectives and approach, as well as the organisational arrangements that will be made for implementation of the policy.

The EIT will provide guidelines/template.

2.2.12 KIC Code of Conduct

The start-up consortium must adopt the KIC Code of Conduct based on the model provided by the EIT which includes policies on conflict of interests, ethical values and integrity.

The Code of Conduct will have to be applied by the KIC, including the LE and CLCs.

In line with the provisions of the model Partnership Agreement, this document must be published on the KIC's website.

2.2.13 Anti-Fraud Strategy

In order to reinforce the highest standards of integrity and to reduce the risk of fraud, the start-up consortium must develop an Anti-fraud Strategy, followed up by an action plan. The Anti-fraud Strategy must be reviewed every two years.

The EIT will provide guidelines/template. The Anti-Fraud Strategy should be published on the KIC's website.

2.2.14 KIC partnership model and growth

From the very start, the newly designated KIC should put appropriate measures in place to ensure long term partnership growth. According to the EIT Strategic Innovation Agenda 2021-2027, the KICs should remain open to new partners throughout its lifetime by adopting and applying transparent, clear and consistent accession and exit criteria for new partners that add value to its partnership.

The KIC shall run its activities in a fully transparent way, including through open calls for identifying and selecting projects, other activities and partners. The KIC shall remain an open and dynamic partnership to new partners across the Union, including SMEs and start-ups that add value to the partnership. The new partners should be able to join the KIC on the basis of excellence and innovation relevance. To this end, the KIC should create inclusive and transparent procedures for funding decisions in order to avoid funding concentration in a limited number of countries and a limited number of KIC partners. Hence, the KIC's Strategic Agenda and partnership growth strategy and measures must address the expansion of the partnership, including the establishment of the new CLCs.

As part of the start-up phase, the consortium has to develop its approach towards partnership growth and design clear and objective partnership criteria and entry – exit procedures, as well as redress procedure for rejected applications. In line with the provisions of the model PA, this document must be published on the KIC's website.

During the start-up phase, an open process to accepting new partners must be ensured. Information about the KIC and its membership should be made available to the public (through website).

2.2.15 KIC Communication policy

The development of the KIC's Communication policy (i.e. communication strategy and plan) contributing to the EIT visibility and identity is one of the key deliverables of the start-up phase. The policy shall comply with Article 8 of the model PA, Article 16 and Annex 5 of the HE Model Grant Agreement and the EIT Community Brand Book.

2.2.16 Monitoring and reporting under the SUGA

The EIT will monitor the implementation of the tasks based on the objectives, deliverables and milestones defined above. It is essential that during the formal start-up period the new KIC adhere to these main deliverables and indicated deadlines.

The coordinator will be asked to provide brief **Quarterly Progress Updates** to the EIT (the template will be provided by the EIT following the signature of the SUGA) to track and assess the progress towards achievement of the milestones and flag any issues, risks and delays encountered.

On a continuous basis, EIT will assess submitted deliverables and achievement of the milestones, following the timeline indicated in Section 2.2.2.

The coordinator shall submit the **Final Report** to the EIT within 60 days after the end of the SUGA (i.e., by **1 March 2027**). Further information on the Final Report can be found in section 13.

Quarterly Progress Updates should be indicated as deliverables in the SUGA application form in Month 3, Month 6, Month 9 and Month 12.

Quarterly Progress Updates and Final Report shall be submitted in English to the EIT.

3 Available budget

The total budget earmarked for the co-financing of the start-up activities is **maximum EUR 5 million.**

4 Timetable and deadlines

The indicative timeline of the submission and evaluation procedure, award and grant implementation is the following:

Key dates	Date and time or indicative period
Designation of the KIC	11 November 2025
Launch of 2025 Call for Start-up Plan proposals	20 November 2025
Opening of 2025 Call for Start-up Plan proposals	27 November 2025
Session for the preparation of the Start-up Plan	November 2025
Deadline for the submission of the Start-up Plan proposals	**16 December 2025**

Eligibility and completeness check	17 - 19 December 2025
Assessment of Start-up Plan	22 December 2025 - 9 January 2026
KIC launch workshop at the EIT in Budapest (and final clarifications on the Start-up Plan proposals)	January 2026
Award decision by EIT Director (i.e. approval of the Start-up Plan and estimated budget and award of the grant)	**February 2026**
Signature of KIC Start-Up Grant Agreement: with a start date for eligibility of costs as of date of 1 January 2026	**February 2026**
Endorsement by the EIT Governing Board of the results of the start-up phase	Before 15 December 2026
Start of implementation of the Business Plan 2027-2028	**1 January 2027**
Signature of Partnership Agreement	**January 2027**
Submission of SUGA Final Report	**1 March 2027**

5 Admissibility

The proposal must be submitted no later than **16 December 2025**.

The proposal must be submitted electronically via the EU Funding and Tenders Portal.

The submission shall comply with the present Invitation text and annexes, and the templates and standards available on the Portal. Failure to comply with this requirement may lead to the rejection of the proposal.

The proposal must be drafted in English.

6 Exclusion criteria

Applicants that are subject to an **EU exclusion decision** or are in one of the following **exclusion situations** that bar them from receiving EU funding can NOT participate[11]:

- 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);

[11] See Articles 138 and 143 of EU Financial Regulation

- guilty of grave professional misconduct [12] (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 fraud, corruption, having 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 their main obligations under an EU procurement contract, grant agreement, prize, expert contract, or similar (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant);
- guilty of irregularities within the meaning of Article 1(2) of Regulation No 2988/95 (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant);
- created under a different jurisdiction an entity 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 resisted[13] 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 that[14]:

- 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 invitation and this entails a distortion of competition that cannot be remedied otherwise (conflict of interest).

Evidence:

[12] '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 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.

[13] '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.

[14] See Article 143 EU Financial Regulation

Beneficiaries and affiliated entities must provide a Declaration on their honour certifying that they are not in one of the situations referred to in Article 138(1):

- All members of the designated consortium have submitted their Declarations on honour when submitting their proposal within the frame of the 2025 KIC Call, for them no new submission is required.

- Any new entity proposed as beneficiary or affiliated entity for the start-up consortium for the start-up year shall submit a Declaration on honour.

- All beneficiaries and affiliated entities of the start-up consortium will be checked in the Early Detection and Exclusion System (EDES) of the European Commission.

- Before the time of the signature of the SUGA, the EIT may request appropriate evidence that the start-up coordinator is not in one of the exclusion situations referred to in Article 138(1) of the EU Financial Regulation: e.g. a recent extract from the judicial record for the legal representative of the coordinator and recent certificates issued by the competent authority/ies of the country of establishment of the coordinator (e.g. certificate from the registry in which the coordinator is registered, tax certificate, social security certificate). This obligation can be waived only in the cases indicated in Article 139(4) of the EU Financial Regulation.

7 Eligibility

7.1 Entities eligible for funding

As a general rule, in accordance with the Horizon Europe Work Programme 2025[15], in order to be eligible for funding, the applicant entities participating in the implementation of the start-up grant must be established in one of the eligible countries, i.e.:

- the Member States (MS) of the European Union (EU) including their outermost regions
- the Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) linked to the Member States[16]
- eligible non-EU countries:
  - Countries associated to Horizon Europe[17]
  - Certain low- and middle-income countries[18]

[15] https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/wp-call/2025/wp-14-general-annexes_horizon-2025_en.pdf

[16] Entities from Overseas Countries and Territories (OCT) are eligible for funding under the same conditions as entities from the Member States to which the OCT in question is linked. See the Horizon Europe Programme Guide on the portal for a complete list of OCTs.

[17] Please see the Horizon Europe Programme Guide on the Funding and Tenders Portal for up-to-date information on the current list of and the position for Associated Countries.

[18] See the Horizon Europe Programme Guide on the Portal for a complete list of these countries.

Legal entities, which are established in countries not listed above can be eligible for funding when their participation is considered by the EIT essential for implementing the action (i.e. start-up activities).

Specifically, in line with Article 198 of the EU Financial Regulation[19], grants may be awarded without a call for proposals to bodies with de jure or de facto monopoly. As the winning consortium, AllWaters was designated by the EIT Governing Board, the de jure and de facto monopoly situation is justified by the fact that only this consortium can be invited to implement the start-up activities.

Therefore, only the winning consortium may submit an eligible proposal for this invitation:

- The coordinator of the winning consortium will be the coordinator of the start-up year.
- Unless well justified and agreed with the EIT, the **composition of 2025 KIC Call Proposal applicants shall correspond to composition of SUGA beneficiaries and affiliated entities, as well as the KIC Partners participating the newly established KIC LE** at the time of the Partnership Agreement signature. As such, the start-up consortium shall not substantially deviate from the 2025 KIC Call proposal consortium.
- The coordinator shall regularly inform the EIT about the partnership development within the duration of the start-up year.

EU restrictions on participation:

- **EU restrictive measures**: 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)[20] as well as Article 75 TFEU[21], are not eligible to participate in any capacity, including as beneficiaries, affiliated entities, associated partners, third parties giving in-kind contributions, subcontractors or recipients of financial support to third parties (if any). Special rules also apply to entities covered by Commission Guidelines No 2013/C 205/0522[22].
- **Legal entities established in Russia, Belarus, or in non-government controlled territories of Ukraine**: Given the illegal invasion of Ukraine by Russia and the involvement of Belarus, there is currently no appropriate context allowing the implementation of the actions foreseen in this programme with legal entities established in Russia, Belarus, or in non-government controlled territories of Ukraine. Therefore, even where such entities are not subject to EU restrictive measures, such legal entities are not eligible to participate in any capacity. This includes participation as beneficiaries, affiliated entities, associated partners, third parties giving in-kind contributions, subcontractors or recipients of financial support to third parties (if any). Exceptions may be granted on a case-by-case basis for justified reasons. With specific regard to measures

[19] 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)

[20] 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

[21] 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

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

addressed to Russia, following the adoption of the Council Regulation (EU) 2024/1745 of 24 June 2024[23] (amending Council Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 of 31 July 2014) concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia's actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine, legal entities established outside Russia but whose proprietary rights are directly or indirectly owned for more than 50% by a legal person, entity or body established in Russia are also not eligible to participate in any capacity.

- **Measures for the protection of the Union budget against breaches of the principles of the rule of law in Hungary**: Following the Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/2506, as of 16 December 2022, no legal commitments can be entered into with Hungarian public interest trusts established under the Hungarian Act IX of 2021 or any entity they maintain. Affected entities may continue to apply to calls for proposals and can participate without receiving EU funding, as associated partners, if allowed by the call conditions. However, as long as the Council measures are not lifted, such entities are not eligible to participate in any funded role (beneficiaries, affiliated entities, subcontractors, recipients of financial support to third parties, etc.). In case of multi-beneficiary grant calls, applicants will be invited to remove or replace that entity in any funded role and/or to change its status into associated partner. Tasks and budget may be redistributed accordingly.
- **Restrictions for the protection of European communication networks**: The protection of European communication networks has been identified as an important security interest of the Union and its Member States[24]. For further information, please refer to the Horizon Europe, Work Programme 2025, General Annexes, B – Eligibility on page 14[25].

7.2 Eligible activities

The eligible activities shall be the start-up activities determined in section 2 above.

8 Financial and operational capacity

The operational capacity of the designated consortium has already been completed in the frame of the 2025 Call for KIC.

The financial capacity of the designated consortium will be assessed in line with the Rules for Legal Entity Validation, LEAR Appointment and Financial Capacity Assessment.

[23] OJ L 229, 31.7.2014, p. 1–11

[24] European Council conclusions of 1 and 2 October 2020 (EUCO 13/20), point 11; Council Conclusions on the significance of 5G to the European Economy and the need to mitigate security risks linked to 5G, 14517/19.

[25] https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/wp-call/2025/wp-14-general-annexes_horizon-2025_en.pdf

9 Award criteria

The start-up grant to the new designated KIC will be determined based on the assessment of the Start-up Plan and estimated budget.

Start-up Plan proposal and the estimated budget will be assessed on the basis of the following criteria:

Criteria		Maximum points: 100
1. Excellence	- Adequateness and completeness of the proposed Start-up Plan, i.e. it covers the entire scope of start-up activities as presented in the List of Milestones, section 2.2.2. - Clarity and pertinence of the Start-up Plan's objectives. - Quality and soundness of the proposed implementation methodology, start-up team and allocation of roles and responsibilities (incl. interim management team) - The proposed Start-up Plan (including the proposed estimated budget) ensures good value for money.	40 [0-5; weighting 8]
2. Impact	- The proposed Start-up Plan is realistic and ensures that the objectives of the start-up grant are achievable. - If the consortium proposes additional activities, their rationale and added value to the KIC's Start-up phase.	20 [0-5; weighting 4]
3. Quality and efficiency of the implementation	- Quality and effectiveness of the work plan, assessment of risks, and appropriateness of the effort assigned to work packages, and the resources overall. - Capacity and role of each participant, and the extent to which the consortium as a whole brings together the necessary expertise. - The proposed transition plan to a permanent team, staffing and approach to talent acquisition and management is suitable to deliver KIC's commercial side of activities and distribute and control the EIT grant.	40 [0-5; weighting 8]

10 Scoring Grid

The Start-Up plan proposal will be evaluated based on the scoring grid as presented below:

0 — The proposal **fails** to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information
1 — **Poor**: the criterion is inadequately addressed or there are serious inherent weaknesses
2 — **Fair**: the proposal broadly addresses the criterion but there are significant weaknesses
3 — **Good**: the proposal addresses the criterion well, but a number of shortcomings are present
4 — **Very good**: the proposal addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present
5 — **Excellent**: the proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion; any shortcomings are minor

Attribution of half scores is possible.

11 Submission of proposal

The proposal must be submitted electronically using the electronic submission system of the Portal of the European Commission:

Funding & Tenders portal

The proposal must be created and submitted by a representative/contact person of the coordinator.

The electronic submission system is an online wizard that guides the applicant step-by-step through the preparation of the proposal. The proposal itself consists of two main parts as structured the Proposal Template:

PART A) administrative forms (structured information of the basic administrative data, declarations of partners, organisations and contact persons, etc.)

PART B) technical annex, which is the detailed description of the Start-up Plan and the estimated budget and Annex on Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP):

1) **Start-up Plan:** the Start-up Plan proposal shall set out the main activities for a rapid start of the KIC and should be developed by using the application form (which will be Annex 1 of the SUGA).

The Start-up Plan proposal shall include all the mandatory activities and deliverables as per the List of Milestones.

The Plan may include additional activities, for example the development of first innovation, education and business creation activities, or participation in Cross-KIC activities in 2026.

Participation during the start-up phase in the activities of the Higher Education Initiative (HEI) and/or in Cross-KIC activities with other KICs, including participation in shared service activities (e.g. use of common IT tools, EIT House in Brussels) is also optional[26].
2) The proposal shall include an **estimated budget**, it shall be prepared by using the application form (which will be Annex 2 of the SUGA) for the start-up period, including a breakdown of costs **per each beneficiary** and **each affiliated entity**[27]. The budget must be drawn up in euros.

More information on how to participate in Horizon Europe proposals is available here: https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/how-to-participate/how-to-participate/1

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, exclusion, financial and operational capacity, etc). Before signing the grant agreement, each beneficiary and affiliated entity will have to confirm this again by signing a Declaration of Honour. Proposals without full support will be rejected.

Your application must be **readable, accessible and printable**.

Proposal is limited to a maximum of **35 pages** (Part B). All tables, figures, references and any other element pertaining to these sections must be included as an integral part of these sections and are thus counted against this page limit. The number of pages included in each section of this template is only indicative. The page limit will be applied automatically.

12 Evaluation

The EIT Evaluation Committee will carry out the evaluation of the proposal with the support of an independent external expert evaluator. Based on the evaluation, the external evaluator will also support the EIT in formulating relevant recommendations and requirements to the consortium.

Should there be a need to clarify some elements of the proposed Start-up Plan or the estimated budget, the EIT will contact the start-up coordinator, representing the applicant consortium.

[26] Participation in these activities must be formalised by the accession of the start-up coordinator or later of the newly established KIC LE to the 2026-2028 Grant Agreement on HEI and to the relevant 2026-2028 Grant Agreements on Cross-KIC activities.
[27] For the definition of affiliated entities, see section 14.

13 Award decision – Grant Agreement signature

13.1 Award decision

The EIT Director, as responsible authorising officer will decide on the award of the start-up grant.

The applicant consortium will be informed about the result of the evaluation process.

13.2 Start-up Grant Agreement (SUGA)

The action will be implemented through the Start-up Grant Agreement to be signed with the consortium.

The SUGA is inbuilt in the eGrants tool and will be signed within the tool (not on paper). It follows the Horizon Europe legal framework and the HE Model Grant Agreement for coordination and support actions (CSA), published on the Funding and Tenders portal.

Any amendment to it should also be managed in eGrants.

The SUGA is composed of:

- Data sheet: laying down all the specific details about the action, including the name of the action, the list of participants, duration and starting date, the grant, the reporting requirements, payments, certificates on financial statements, and other details
- Terms and Conditions
- Annex 1 Start-up Plan: description of the action
- Annex 2 Estimated budget for the action
- Annex 2a Additional information on unit costs and contributions (if applicable)
- Annex 3 Accession Forms
- Annex 3a Declaration on joint and several liability of affiliated entities (if applicable)
- Annex 4 Model for the financial statements
- Annex 5 Specific rules

In accordance with Article 40 of the SUGA:

- **Accession of the beneficiaries mentioned in the Preamble of the SUGA:**
  The beneficiaries which are not coordinator must accede to the grant by signing the accession form (see Annex 3 of the SUGA) directly in the Portal Grant Preparation tool, within **30 days after the entry into force of the Agreement**. They will assume the rights and obligations under the Agreement with effect from the date of its entry into force. If a beneficiary does not accede to the grant within the above deadline, the coordinator must — within 30 days — request an amendment to terminate the beneficiary and make any changes necessary to ensure proper implementation of the action.

- **Addition of new beneficiaries:**
  In justified cases, the beneficiaries may request the addition of a new beneficiary. For this purpose, the coordinator must submit a request for amendment in accordance with Article 39 of

the SUGA. It must include an accession form (see Annex 3 of the SUGA) signed by the new beneficiary directly in the Portal Amendment tool. New beneficiaries will assume the rights and obligations under the Agreement with effect from the date of their accession specified in the accession form.

13.3 Partnership Agreement (PA)

In case of appropriate implementation of the Start-up Plan and the endorsement by the EIT Governing Board of the successful start-up period in late 2026, the seven-year Partnership Agreement (PA) may be signed between the EIT and the newly established KIC. The PA lays down the main principles of the KIC model. The Strategic Agenda of the KIC will be annexed to the PA.

13.4 Grant Agreement 2027-2028, HEI Grant Agreement and Cross-KIC Grant Agreements

Following the signature of the Partnership Agreement, and upon condition of the approval of the KIC Business Plan 2027-2028, Grant Agreement (GA) 2027-2028 will be signed in early 2027. The GA will also follow the HE Model Grant Agreement published on the Funding and Tenders Portal.

Additionally, as of 2027, the KIC will participate in the Higher Education Initiative (HEI) activities and will have the possibility to participate in Cross-KIC activities, which are subject to separate grant agreements[28].

14 Financial provisions

The eligible and ineligible costs and contributions (Article 6 of the SUGA), the form of grant (Article 5.1 of the SUGA), the maximum grant amount (Article 5.2 of the SUGA), the funding rate (Article 5.3 of the SUGA), the reporting (Article 21 of the SUGA) and the payment arrangements (Article 22.1 of the SUGA) together with other financial conditions are described in the Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement.

Eligible costs (Article 6 of the SUGA):

The **first date of eligibility** starts on 1 January 2026.

The start-up grant may cover up to a maximum of **100% of the eligible costs** of activities set out in the Start-up Plan. Nevertheless, beneficiaries may consider the use of other sources of funding to finance start-up activities.

[28] Participation in these activities **in the start-up period** is optional and must be formalised by the accession of the start-up coordinator or later of the newly established KIC LE to the 2026-2028 Grant Agreement on HEI and to the relevant 2026-2028 Grant Agreement(s) on Cross-KIC activities.

14.1 Eligibility of direct and indirect costs

The following costs of indirect nature cannot be claimed by the Coordinator and/or Partners, KIC LE and entities associated to the KIC LE (CLCs etc.) as direct costs: **office costs** (utilities, maintenance, telecommunication, licences, etc.), **office supplies** (furniture, stationery, etc.), **corporate finance** incl. bookkeeping, **IT equipment** (laptops, computers, monitors, mobile phones, etc.), **postage**, etc.

Those costs shall be covered by the indirect costs flat-rate 25% of eligible direct personnel costs and purchase costs (travel & subsistence, equipment, other goods, works & services).

Despite IT and rental costs are normally considered as indirect costs, the following exceptions apply:

- IT costs (including licences) covered by the Shared Service "Centre of Administrative Excellence" and/or related to IT tools used for the implementation of a specific thematic activity (e.g. education platform development and licences, etc.);
- Rental costs covered under the framework of the Shared Service "Centre of Administrative Excellence".

Nota bene: Consortium needs to pay particular attention on properly budgeting direct and indirect costs, in line with this invitation's conditions and GA provisions. The EIT reserves the right to review the cost classification provided in Annex 1 (Part B) during the assessment of financial reports. If a cost declared as a direct cost does not meet the relevant eligibility criteria of the grant agreement, the EIT will consider it ineligible.

Eligible costs for equipment, infrastructure and other assets

Normally, only SUGA-related depreciation costs of equipment, infrastructure or other assets (new or second-hand) as recorded in the beneficiary's accounts are eligible.

Ineligible costs (Article 6.3 of the SUGA) are:

- costs that do not comply with the conditions set out in Article 6.1 and 6.2 of the SUGA (e.g. costs related to return on capital and dividends paid by a beneficiary, debt and debt service charges, bank costs, excessive or reckless expenditure, deductible or refundable VAT);
- costs declared under another EU or Euratom grant;
- costs or contributions for staff of a national (or regional/local) administration, for activities that are part of the administration's normal activities (i.e. not undertaken only because of the grant);
- costs or contributions (especially travel and subsistence) for staff or representatives of EU institutions, bodies or agencies;
- other:
  - (i) costs or contributions for activities that do not take place in the eligible countries or target countries set out in the present invitation — unless approved by the granting authority;
  - (ii) costs or contributions declared specifically ineligible in the conditions of the present invitation.

For further information please refer to Article 6.3 of the SUGA.

Subcontracting (Article 6.2.B and Article 9.3 of the SUGA): If necessary to implement the action, the beneficiaries may award subcontracts covering the implementation of certain action tasks. Subcontracting costs for the action (including related duties, taxes and charges, such as non-deductible or non-refundable value added tax (VAT)) are eligible, if they are calculated on the basis of the costs actually incurred, fulfil the general eligibility conditions and are awarded using the beneficiary's usual purchasing practices — provided these ensure subcontracts with best value for money (or if appropriate the lowest price) and that there is no conflict of interests.

Beneficiaries that are 'contracting authorities' within the meaning of Directive 2004/18/EC[29] (or 2014/24/EU[30]) or contracting entities' within the meaning of Directive 2004/17/EC[31] (or 2014/25/EU[32]) must comply with the applicable national law on public procurement.

The tasks to be subcontracted and the estimated cost for each subcontract must be set out in the Start-up Plan (Annex 1 of the SUGA) and the total estimated costs of subcontracting per beneficiary must be set out in the estimated budget (Annex 2 of the SUGA, or may be approved ex post in the final report, if the use of subcontracting does not entail changes to the SUGA which would call into question the decision awarding the grant or breach the principle of equal treatment of applicants; 'simplified approval procedure').

During the start-up year, the consortium shall develop the KIC's Procurement Policy (see section 2.2.8).

Financial support to third parties (Article 9 of the SUGA):

Financial support to third parties involves funding provided by a beneficiary to a recipient that is not a party to the grant agreement. Financial support to third parties includes sub-grants (financial support to third parties, Article 6.2.D.1 (a) of the SUGA); and financial support in the form of prizes (Article 6.2.D.1 (b) of the SUGA).

As a general rule, financial support can be awarded to entities established in HE eligible countries (see Chapter 7.) and should not exceed **EUR 60,000** per recipient under the SUGA.

If the recipient of financial support is established in a third country not eligible under HE:

- in case of recipients of financial support **above EUR 60,000**: if the entity is not eligible for funding under a national scheme, they may receive EIT funding on an exceptional basis agreed with the EIT, if the participation of the entity established in the third country is deemed essential for the action;

[29] Directive 2004/18/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 31 March 2004 on the coordination of procedures for the award of public works contracts, public supply contracts and public service contracts (OJ L 134, 30.4.2004, p. 114)

[30] Directive 2014/24/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 February 2014 on public procurement and repealing Directive 2004/18/EC (OJ L 94, 28.3.2014, p. 65)

[31] Directive 2004/17/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 31 March 2004 coordinating the procurement procedures of entities operating in the water, energy, transport and postal services sectors (OJ L 134, 30.4.2004, p. 1)

[32] Directive 2014/25/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 February 2014 on procurement by entities operating in the water, energy, transport and postal services sectors and repealing Directive 2004/17/EC (OJ L 94, 28.3.2014, p. 243)

- in case of recipients of financial support **below EUR 60,000**: the financial support to third parties may be awarded, if duly justified.

Affiliated entities (Article 8 of the SUGA):

'Affiliated entities' included in the Data Sheet and Article 8 of the SUGA may implement the action tasks attributed to them in the Start-up Plan. The affiliated entity may declare the costs they incur for implementing the action tasks as eligible.

As a rule, declarations on joint and several liability will be requested by EIT if the budget of the affiliated entity is higher than the budget of the beneficiary, with the following exceptions:

a. If the total budget of the affiliated entity is lower than EUR 100,000;

b. If the affiliated entity is a public body.

The Declaration on joint and several liability (see Annex 3a of the SUGA) will be requested from the affiliated entities which fall into the above situation. Non-submission of the declaration may result in rejection of the costs for the affiliated entity concerned.

14.2 Reporting and payment arrangements

In accordance with the Articles 21 and 22.1 of SUGA, the start-up phase coordinator may request the following payments, provided that the conditions of the SUGA are fulfilled (e.g. payment deadlines, ceilings, etc.):

- **Pre-financing payment** (up to 75% of the total amount): the payment will be made within 30 days following the signature of the SUGA.

  5% as a contribution to the Mutual Insurance Mechanism will be retained from the prefinancing payment.

- **Final Report and final payment:**

  - Within 60 days following the end of the reporting period, the **Final Report** will have to be submitted to the EIT.

    The final report shall include a technical and financial part.

    The technical final report shall include an overview of the action implementation summarizing the results and the conclusions on the action.

    The financial part of the final report shall include:

    - the financial statements (individual and consolidated; for all beneficiaries/affiliated entities)

    - the explanation on the use of resources

- the certificates on the financial statements (CFS) for each beneficiary and for each affiliated entity, if it requests a total EIT contribution of EUR 430,000 or more.

- The final payment will be made within 90 days from receiving the Final Report. The EIT will establish the amount of the final payment in line with Article 22.3.4 of the SUGA.

No interim payment will be made.

The Quarterly Progress Updates are not linked to any payment.

15 Publicity

In line with Article 17.1 of the SUGA, unless otherwise agreed with the EIT, the beneficiaries must promote the action and its results by providing targeted information to multiple audiences (including the media and the public), in accordance with the Start-up Plan and in a strategic, coherent and effective manner. (This does not change the confidentiality obligations in Article 13 of the SUGA which still apply.)

Unless otherwise agreed with the EIT, communication activities of the beneficiaries related to the action (including media relations, conferences, seminars, information material, such as brochures, leaflets, posters, presentations, etc., in electronic form, via traditional or social media, etc.), dissemination activities and any infrastructure, equipment, vehicles, supplies or major result funded by the grant must

(a) acknowledge EU support and display the European flag (emblem) and funding statement (translated into local languages, where appropriate).
(b) display the EIT KIC logo as adopted by the EIT;
(c) follow the brand guidelines outlined in the EIT Community Brand Book as adopted by the EIT.

For further information, please refer to Article 8 of the Partnership Agreement and Article 17 of the SUGA.

In accordance with Article 38 of the EU Financial Regulation, the European Commission shall make available, on a centralised website information on recipients of funds financed from the budget no later than 30 June of the year following the financial year in which the funds were legally committed.

The following information shall be published (with the exceptions listed in Article 38(3) of the Financial Regulation), in an open, interoperable and machine-readable format, which allows data to be sorted, searched, extracted, compared and reused, having due regard for the requirements of confidentiality and security, in particular the protection of personal data:

(a) whether the recipient is a natural or a legal person;
(b) the recipient's full legal name in the case of a legal person and their VAT identification number or tax identification number where available or another unique identifier established at country level, the first and last name of the recipient in the case of a natural person;
(c) the locality of the recipient (i.e. the address of the recipient when the recipient is a legal person);
(d) the amount legally committed;
(e) the nature and the purpose of the measure.

16 Processing of personal data

The reply to the present Invitation involves the recording and processing of personal data (such as name, address). Such data will be processed by the EIT pursuant to Regulation (EU) 2018/1725 of the European Parliament and of the Council 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[33]. Any personal data requested in accordance with the Invitation for the Start-up Plan and estimated budget will be processed solely for that purpose by the EIT. The EIT privacy statement for the management of grants is available at:

https://eit.europa.eu/who-we-are/legal-framework/data-protection

Personal data may be registered in the Early Detection and Exclusion System by the Commission, should the beneficiary be in one of the situations mentioned in Article 136 and 141 of the EU Financial Regulation (for more information see the privacy statement on: https://ec.europa.eu/info/data-protection-public-procurement-procedures_en).

[33] Regulation (EU) 2018/1725 of the European Parliament and of the Council 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

List of Reference Documents (hyperlinked)

1. Horizon Europe (HE) Framework Programme for Research and Innovation
2. EU Financial Regulation
3. EIT Regulation (recast)
4. EIT Strategic Innovation Agenda 2021-2027
5. EIT Innovation Model Paper
6. Partnership Agreement
7. Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement (HE MGA):
    - "Coordinating and Support Action (CSA)" type to be used as SUGA
    - "EIT KIC action" type to be used for Business Plan / HEI / Cross-KIC Grant Agreements
    - HE MGA Annex 5 Annotation: to be shared with KIC as part of the Invitation package
8. Governing Board Decision 6/2022 on the financial sustainability principles
9. EIT Governing Board Decision 14/2021 on the principles for financing, monitoring and evaluating KIC activities
10. Supervision Framework of KICs
11. EIT Impact Framework 2021-2027
12. EIT Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy 2021-2027
13. EIT Label Framework
    - Decision 11/2021 of the EIT Governing Board on the new EIT Label Framework
    - EIT Decision 26/2021 on the adoption of the new EIT Label Handbook for degree programmes
    - EIT Decision 62/2022 on the adoption of the EIT Label Handbook for the EIT Fellowships and the EIT Label Handbook for non-degree education and EIT competence certification model
        - Eit_label_fellowship_handbook.pdf
        - Eit_label_nondegree_handbook.pdf

14. Updated EIT Regional Innovation Scheme Implementation Framework
15. EIT Community Brand Book
16. EIT Code of Conduct model: to be shared with KIC as part of the Invitation package

Electronically signed on 21/11/2025 14:38 (UTC+01) in accordance with Article 11 of Commission Decision (EU) 2021/2121