

OPEN CALL TO ACCESS CASCADE FUNDING FOR INNOVATION PROJECTS

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)



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Purpose

The information in this document is based on the rules and conditions described in the *Guidelines for Applicants* of RIVCircular project <https://www.rivcircular.eu/>.

This FAQ document complements but does not replace the *Guidelines for Applicants*; ***in the event of conflicting interpretations, the information in those Guidelines takes precedence.***

For additional questions, please contact **info@rivcircular.eu** and for regional-specific consultations, see the regional contact emails in section 3 of the guidelines for applicants.

History of changes

Version	Publication date	Description
1	16/04/2026	Initial version
2	05/05/2026	Updates to questions 1, 2, and 4. Addition of question 32
3	16/06/2026	Updates to questions 10 and 17. Additions of questions 33-44

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1 WHAT IS RIVCIRCULAR?

RIVCircular is part of the European Innovation Valleys (RIV) initiative under the Horizon Europe Programme (Pillar III – European Innovation Ecosystems) and is coordinated by the Community of Madrid (Spain).

Aligned with the New European Innovation Agenda, the project aims to accelerate innovation across European ecosystems and bridge the innovation divide.

RIVCircular fosters cooperation among seven European territories:

- Southern: Madrid, Extremadura, Greece
- Central: Hauts-de-France and Vienna
- Northern: Innlandet
- Eastern: Kyiv-Oblast

The project takes a holistic approach to the circular economy, promoting interregional collaboration and exchange of knowledge, best practices, and innovation among public authorities, companies, and research institutions.

2 WHAT CAN BE EXPECTED FROM RIVCIRCULAR?

The project aims to:

- Enhance policy-making through stakeholder engagement
- Build capacities, skills, and expertise related to the circular economy
- Remove barriers hindering circular economy development in Europe

Horizontal activities include:

- Studies on market barriers
- Innovation in public and green procurement
- Capacity-building for a circular future

Additionally, a cascade funding call will support Innovation Action projects (TRL 6–8).

Expected project types:

2–3 years for projects focused on one of the following topics:

- Construction & demolition waste (CDW)
- textiles,
- batteries,
- resource recovery

1–2 years for projects focused on:

- Digitalisation in the circular economy

Almost €13 million will be allocated through calls for proposals.

3 WHO CAN APPLY?

Legal entities from the RIVCircular territories.

Eligibility also depends on territory-specific criteria (see section 3 of the Guidelines for Applicants).

Typical eligible entities:

- SMEs and large companies
- Universities
- Research institutes
- Technology centres
- Civil society organisations

Individual applications and natural persons are not eligible.

4 HOW DOES THE CONSORTIUM MUST BE FORMED?

Consortia must be formed by three (3) entities from at least three (3) different Member States or contracting parties to the European Economic Area Agreement (EEA Agreement), in which are involved the RIVCircular participating territories.

Note: Ukraine is not a member state nor a contracting part of EEA Agreement. So, consortia that are formed by a Ukrainian entity must be constituted by a minimum of 4 entities, to be eligible according to the minimum of 3 partners criteria (Member States or contracting parties to EEA Agreement).

Examples:

Eligible consortium	Not an eligible consortium
1. Kyiv Oblast entity 2. Hauts de France entity 3. Madrid entity 4. Innlandet entity	1. Kyiv Oblast entity 2. Hauts de France entity 3. Innlandet entity

Another case to consider is the requirement that the consortium must be formed by entities from different regions and different countries. Since Extremadura and Madrid belong to the same country, there are scenarios in which certain consortia would not be eligible. It should also be considered that, instead of three entities, a minimum of four entities may be required.

Eligible consortium	Not an eligible consortium
1. Madrid entity 2. Extremadura entity 3. Vienna entity 4. Hauts de France entity	1. Madrid entity 2. Extremadura entity 3. Vienna entity

For topics 1 to 4, SMEs participation is encouraged and for topic 5: Digital Solutions for Circular Economy it is compulsory.

5 HOW MANY PARTNERS ARE OPTIMAL FOR THE PROJECT?

There isn't an optimal number; it depends on the activities you are planning and the expertise needed. Part of the value of a consortium in European projects lies in the collaboration between diverse organizations, such as universities, businesses, and research centres, which bring complementary knowledge and resources. A consortium formed by different type of institutions is recommended.

6 CAN A CONSORTIUM INCLUDE MORE THAN ONE ENTITY FROM THE SAME REGION?

Yes, a consortium can include more than one entity from the same region as long as the minimum eligibility requirements for consortium composition are fully met.

7 HOW CAN INTERESTED ENTITIES FROM ELIGIBLE REGIONS BE FOUND?

To find interested entities, you can use the Matchmaking Platform created for RIVCircular project. You can register and fill in your profile detailing your entity's expertise, capacities and interests. Also on this platform, you can search by region, topic or keywords and request one-to-one meetings. You will also find regional representatives to consult on the specific region if necessary. [Home | RIVCircular Matchmaking Platform](#)

8 ARE SMES ENCOURAGED TO PARTICIPATE?

Yes, SMEs are strongly encouraged to participate, especially in roles involving innovation development, market analysis, and exploitation.

In topic 5 is compulsory the participation of at least one SME.

9 CAN PARTNERS FROM REGIONS OUTSIDE RIVCIRCULAR PARTICIPATE?

No. Only entities established and active in the RIVCircular territories associated with each topic (see Table 2 in the Guidelines) are eligible for funding.

10 WHAT TYPES OF PROJECTS ARE SUPPORTED?

Projects must focus on circular economy innovation (TRL 6–8) and address RIVCircular missions or sub-missions: deliver technologies, products, or services in the circular economy field, demonstrate scalability and impact, and include the required geographical cooperation.

Funded activities (TRL 6–8): prototyping, testing and demonstration, piloting, large-scale validation, market replication. More specifications: <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/career-development/researchers/manual-scientific-entrepreneurship/major-steps/trl>

During project implementation, the proposed solutions are expected to demonstrate progress in their technological maturity through validation, demonstration, piloting, or scaling activities, moving closer to real market conditions or industrial implementation, potentially reaching TRL 8.

The objective of the call is to support innovative technologies and solutions with deployment potential and practical application, beyond the early stages of basic research.

In short-duration projects, it may happen that a technology needs to start and end at the same TRL level (always within the 6–8 range). This is eligible if necessary for the project and if it is duly justified that the technological progress does not scale to the next level.

11 WHICH SECTORS ARE PRIORITISED?

- Construction and demolition waste (CDW)
- Circular energy integration
- EV batteries recycling & reuse
- Circular economy in the textile industry
- Digital solutions for the circular economy

12 WHAT IS THE RECOMMENDED BUDGET PER TOPIC?

- Topic 1 – CDW circularity: €1–2M
- Topic 2 – Circular energy integration: €1–2M
- Topic 3 – EV batteries reuse & recycling: €1–2M
- Topic 4 – Circular textiles: €1–2M
- Topic 5 – Digital solutions: €200–700k

13 WHAT MUST PROJECTS DELIVER?

- Technological or social innovations:
 - Working prototypes
 - Demonstration of technology in relevant environments
 - Market-ready products or services
- Clear impact indicators (KPIs)
- Dissemination and exploitation plans
- Contributions to RIVCircular missions and EU circular economy objectives, as well as the regional objectives and purposes.

14 WHAT SHOULD BE THE LENGTH OF THE PROJECTS?

This call is intended for projects lasting two to three years for Topics 1 to 4, and one to two years for projects under Topic 5.

15 WHAT ARE THE MAIN EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR THE PROPOSALS?

Applications are evaluated based on:

- Excellence (30%) – alignment with priorities, innovation level
- Impact (40%) – environmental, social, and economic benefits
- Quality & efficiency of implementation (30%) – feasibility, team expertise, budget clarity and coherence.

A minimum score of 3/5 is required in each criterion, considering a threshold of 11 points in total.

16 IS IT ACCEPTABLE TO PROPOSE FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OR APPLICATIONS OF AN EXISTING PROTOTYPE FOR THE RIVCIRCULAR CALL OR IS THERE A PREFERENCE FOR ENTIRELY NEW PROTOTYPES?

There is no preference for working on a prototype that already exists or on a new one. You should ensure a technology readiness level between 6 and 8. It is up to the consortium to demonstrate the scalability and the impact. Activities that have already been funded under other programmes or funding schemes cannot be financed again under this call. Double funding of the same activities is not permitted.

17 WHAT COST CONCEPTS ARE ELIGIBLE?

The eligible cost categories are:

1. Personnel costs
2. Travel costs
3. Equipment costs (only depreciation cost)
4. Other goods & services
5. Subcontracting (up to 10% of the direct costs)
6. Indirect costs (According to the guidelines, the % varies in regions where are applicable)

In terms of cost eligibility, RIVCircular project follows the guidelines of the European Commission.

Internal rental costs are not directly eligible and cannot be declared as a separate cost item in the proposal. Internal rent is considered part of the general operating costs covered through indirect costs (overheads); this percentage and coverage of these costs vary among the different regions.

VAT is considered an eligible cost, only if it is non-deductible and non-recoverable. VAT may be considered eligible when the beneficiary entity cannot recover it from the national tax authorities. If the organization can deduct or recover VAT, it cannot be declared as an eligible cost. If an organization applies a VAT pro rata system, normally only the non-recoverable portion of the VAT may be considered an eligible cost. The recoverable percentage is not eligible for funding (as this would result in double financing).

18 HOW SHOULD OVERHEADS BE CALCULATED?

The percentage for calculating overheads varies depending on the region. Indirect costs are not eligible for organisations established in Kyiv Oblast. Applicants should always refer to the relevant regional guidelines to determine the applicable overhead rate.

Please, note that subcontracting costs are not included in the overhead cost calculation.

19 WHAT TYPE OF COSTS CAN BE SUBCONTRACTED?

Subcontracting is allowed for specific tasks or activities that cannot be efficiently carried out by the consortium partners themselves. All subcontracted activities must be clearly justified, included in the budget, and compliant with the rules on eligible costs

As a general rule, work can be subcontracted in line with the ‘best-value-for-money’ principle or lower price, and provided that conflicts of interest are avoided. Subcontracting could be up to 10% of the direct costs, provided that the need is duly justified.

20 ARE ALL TYPES OF PARTICIPANTS FUNDED AT 100% OF COSTS INCURRED?

No, the percentage of eligible costs funded by the RIVCircular Call varies based on the type of organisation and region (see guidelines for Applicant). For partners in Hauts de France for businesses a specific aid scheme has been created and is available here:

<https://www.europe-en-france.gouv.fr/fr/aides-d-etat/regimes-d-aide/sa123056-regime-aides-projets-recherche-developpement-cadre-projet-riv>

21 HOW TO APPLY?

21.1 Is it compulsory to register on the Horizon Europe Platform?

Although this Cascade funding will not use the Funding and Tender platform for proposal admissions, the registration in the **EU Funding and Tenders Portal** is compulsory for all entities that are part of a consortium, as a **PIC (Participant Identification Code)** is required in order to submit a proposal via the RIVCircular website.

21.2 What is a PIC number?

A **PIC number** is a unique nine-digit identifier assigned to an organization when it registers in the EU Funding and Tenders Portal. It is used to identify participants in EU-funded projects and is required for submitting applications.

21.3 What are the steps to register to obtain a PIC number?

To register, follow these steps:

1. Go to the [Funding & Tenders Portal](#).
2. Create an EU Login account (if you don't have one).
3. Click on "Register an organisation" and fill in the required details.
4. Once the registration is complete, your organization will receive a PIC number that you'll have to indicate in the application templates that are required.

Note: A registered PIC is sufficient to submit a proposal. Validation may be required later during the grant agreement phase.

21.4 Where do I have to upload the application documents?

Applicants must submit the 4 compulsory documents:

1. Form A (PDF format)
2. Form B (PFD format),
3. Budget Template (Excel format)
4. Completed and signed document: Declaration on double Funding for recipients, as there is a strict prohibition of double funding from the EU budget (except under EU Synergies actions). This document is in Annex 8 of the Guidelines for Applicants and will be available for download, along with the other compulsory templates, on the RIVCircular website.

There will be boxes available to upload each document. And the application will be done via the button "submit" available on the RIVCircular website (cascade funding section).

Ensure to use the available templates.

Ensure you fill in all sections of the templates and follow the checklist in the Guidelines for applicants' documents.

There will be a document called Form B Instructions that is just for reference and guidance, so it is not meant to be completed.

21.5 Who can set up the project proposal in the online submission system?

Consortia must have a coordinator. Only the coordinator may submit the proposal on behalf of the entire consortium.

Only one submission per proposal will be accepted and within the deadline.

21.6 Will applicants be able to modify their application after submission?

No. Applicants cannot modify their application after submission. However, in some cases, there may be an option to update or correct certain details within a specific timeframe or under special circumstances. It is important to review the guidelines for applicants for detailed instructions on this matter.

21.7 Is there any page limit that must be respected?

Yes. The proposals must comply with the 30-page limit in Form B. Any content exceeding this limit will **not** be taken into consideration during the evaluation.

22 IS THE FINANCIAL INFORMATION OF THE CONSORTIUM ENTITIES SUPPOSED TO BE CHECKED?

Yes, the financial information of the consortium entities will be checked by each region. This is to ensure the financial viability and eligibility of the participating organisations.

23 CAN ENTITIES FROM THE SAME CORPORATE GROUP SUBMIT MULTIPLE PROPOSALS?

Yes. If entities have distinct legal and fiscal identities and their own PIC, they may submit different proposals.

24 HOW WILL FUNDING PAYMENTS BE MADE?

Payments will be made according to the criteria of each region and territory. Please refer to section: *Specific eligibility criteria by type of participating entity, topic, and region* of the Guidelines for Applicants.

25 WHEN MUST THE CONSORTIUM AGREEMENT AND GRANT AGREEMENT BE SIGNED?

The Grant Agreement will be signed after the proposal is selected for funding.

The Consortium Agreement must be signed by all partners at the same time as the Grant Agreement.

If needed, partners may sign a private agreement earlier (e.g., for IP reasons during proposal preparation).

26 WHO SIGNS THE GRANT AGREEMENT?

The Grant Agreement is signed between the coordinator of the beneficiary project and the RIVCircular project coordinator regarding technical aspects, financial aspects and other requirements with the granting entity according to each region's rules.

It is not signed directly with the European Commission, but it follows the same principles and obligations, and it will also follow the specifications of each region.

27 WHAT HAPPENS IF A CONSORTIUM PARTNER WITHDRAWS?

The consortium must notify RIVCircular immediately. A replacement or project adaptation must be proposed. Substantial changes require RIVCircular approval.

28 WHAT ARE THE RULES REGARDING INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY?

Project results belong to the consortium partners. RIVCircular and the European Commission retain rights to disseminate results under Horizon Europe rules. To sign a Consortium Agreement is compulsory in these cases.

29 SINCE OUR PROJECT IDEA IS CONFIDENTIAL, WHAT MEASURES ARE TAKEN BY RIVCIRCULAR TO ENSURE CONFIDENTIALITY?

Experts-evaluators will be signing a confidentiality agreement and a no conflicts of interest document.

30 HOW TO SUBMIT A COMPLAINT?

To file a formal complaint regarding the call process, evaluation, or communication, applicants must use the template provided in Annex 7. Please refer to section 10 in the Guidelines for Applicants.

31 WHERE TO FIND MORE INFORMATION?

All information is available on the official website RIVCircular, including:

- Detailed call documentation: Guidelines for applicants.
- Templates to submit the call: Form A, Form B, Budget template
- Call information with important dates and conditions
- Instructions to activate a profile in the RIVCircular Matchmaking Platform.
- Info@rivcircular.eu

32 CAN A SAME ENTITY SUBMIT MORE THAN ONE PROPOSAL?

Yes, the same entity can submit more than one proposal to the same topic or to different topics; however, the same entity will not be funded with more than €600,000.

If more than one proposal submitted by the same entity is positively evaluated and selected for funding, the total funding granted will not exceed €600,000, which may represent a risk for the consortium concerned.

33 HOW IS IT DETERMINED WITHIN THE SAME INSTITUTION WHICH PROJECT CAN ACCESS FUNDING, CONSIDERING THERE IS A €600,000 FUNDING LIMIT PER ENTITY?

If the administrative eligibility is validated, no project will be discarded during the eligibility phase; all projects will proceed to the evaluation phase carried out by the expert committee to establish the corresponding ranking. If two or more projects from the same institution are recommended for

funding after the evaluation, funding will only be granted in order of score until the €600,000 funding limit is reached.

34 IS PRE-FINANCING PROVIDED FOR THE BENEFICIARIES?

Eligibility criteria differ by region. Please review Section 3, *Eligibility Criteria*, as the applicable requirements vary based on the geographic region.

Region	Pre-financing
Madrid	Yes, after the signature of the Agreement
Hauts de France	No
Innlandet	Yes, after the signature of the Agreement
Kyiv	No
Vienna	Yes, after the signature of the Agreement
Greece	No
Extremadura	Yes, after the signature of the Agreement

35 MUST THE PROJECT ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING THE PILOT(S) TO BE DEVELOPED, BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE FUNDED REGIONS? IF ACTIVITIES ARE CARRIED OUT OUTSIDE THE FUNDED REGIONS, IS A JUSTIFICATION REQUIRED?

Yes. Project activities, including the pilot(s) to be developed, are expected to be implemented within the regions participating in the consortia. If any activities are carried out outside those regions, this must be clearly justified. It should be demonstrated why the location of that pilot is necessary and why the project would not be able to achieve its objectives without that pilot.

36 CAN A PROJECT'S COSTS EXCEED THE PLANNED BUDGET PER TOPIC?

While exceeding the recommended amount is generally not advisable, it may be acceptable if it is properly justified by the scope and nature of the activities to be carried out. The budget should be realistic, proportionate, and clearly linked to the proposed activities, rather than artificially inflated.

37 DO SOLUTIONS ALWAYS HAVE TO BE DEVELOPED FOR PRODUCTS?

No. Solutions do not necessarily have to result in a product. They may involve the development of technology, methodology, or new business models, among other types of innovations.

38 WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PRODUCT SOLUTIONS/INNOVATION AND BUSINESS SOLUTIONS/INNOVATION?

The general definition of an innovation is as follows, according to the Oslo Manual:

*An **innovation** is a new or improved product or process (or combination thereof) that differs significantly from the unit's previous products or processes and that has been made available to potential users (product) or brought into use by the unit (process)*
(p.20)

The basic definitions of a product and business process innovation, described in the Oslo Manual, are as follows:

Product innovation: *a new or improved good or service that differs significantly from the firm's previous goods or services and that has been introduced on the market.* (p.21)

Business process innovation *is a new or improved business process for one or more business functions that differs significantly from the firm's previous business processes and that has been brought into use by the firm* (p.21)

Definitions based on OECD & Eurostat (2018), Oslo Manual 2018: Guidelines for Collecting, Reporting and Using Data on Innovation.

39 ARE FUNDING COSTS THE SAME AS PROJECT COSTS?

No. Project costs refer to the total costs incurred in implementing the project. Funding costs, on the other hand, refer to the portion of those costs that are covered by the grant. Depending on the applicable funding rate, beneficiaries may be required to co-finance part of the project costs.

40 HOW SHOULD THE FUNDING BE DISTRIBUTED AMONG CONSORTIUM PARTNERS?

The distribution of the budget among consortium partners should reflect their respective roles, responsibilities, and contributions to the project. There is no requirement for the consortium coordinator or lead partner to receive the largest share of the funding. Budget allocations should be justified, proportionate to the planned activities, and clearly explained in the proposal.

41 ARE MICRO-ENTERPRISES AND START-UPS ALSO ELIGIBLE TO SUBMIT PROPOSALS?

Yes, provided that they are duly established in the territories eligible under this call and comply with the eligibility requirements applicable to their respective region.

42 ARE THERE ANY SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS TO ACT AS A PROJECT COORDINATOR?

The coordinator may be any entity eligible under this call and able to demonstrate the operational capacity to manage the project. It is advisable for the coordinator to have experience in European projects to comply with the specific conditions of the call. Any type of entity can act as a project coordinator, as long as the organization is eligible under the call and has the necessary capacity to coordinate the project. However, it is recommended that entities with experience in European calls coordinate the project.

43 CAN AN ENTITY CURRENTLY WORKING AS A SUBCONTRACTOR IN A EUROPEAN PROJECT APPLY TO THE CALL, OR WOULD THIS BE CONSIDERED DOUBLE FUNDING?

Double funding occurs when the same activities, costs, or results are financed simultaneously by two different European funds.

In this regard, an entity participating as a subcontractor in a European project may apply to the RIVCircular call as a member of a consortium.

Furthermore, the subcontractor role does not imply the same responsibilities or conditions as those assumed by beneficiary partners within a European consortium. Therefore, participating as a subcontractor in another project does not prevent participation in the RIVCircular call.

To participate as a subcontractor, the contracting entity must justify, at the appropriate time, why and how a specific entity was selected, verify that its usual procurement practices were followed, and demonstrate compliance with the “best value for money” principle through transparent selection procedures.

44 WHICH DOCUMENTS MUST BE SIGNED BY THE LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE OF OUR INSTITUTION WITHIN THE PROPOSAL PHASE?

The only document that must be submitted signed is Annex 8, and it only needs to be signed by the coordinator on behalf of the consortium. Internally, the coordinator may request the other consortium members to sign an authorization letter allowing the coordinator to sign on behalf of all partners.