

EU Apply AI Strategy

AI Entrepreneurs Lab Call

Rules and regulations for applicants

From Graduate to a Venture Founder

INNOBC XKIC 2026-2028, Project ID 101268805

28DIGITAL

Brussels, July 2026

<https://28DIGITAL.eu>

HISTORY OF CHANGES			
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1.1	10.07.2026	Adapted draft based on VIP 2026 format and AI Factory X scope; vocabulary tightened.	
1.2	06.08.2026	Clarified two-stages process	

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Abbreviations

EIT	European Institute of Innovation and Technology
KIC	Knowledge and Innovation Community
EIT SIA	EIT Strategic Innovation Agenda
PA	Partnership Agreement
HE MGA	Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement
KIC SA	KIC Strategic Agenda
BP	Business Plan
EIT KPIs	Key Performance Indicators set by EIT
KAVA	KIC-added value activity
FSTP	Financial support to third parties
MC	28DIGITAL Management Committee
MoC	Memorandum of Cooperation

Definitions

Knowledge Triangle Integration	The EIT is established to complement existing Union and national policies and initiatives by fostering the integration of the knowledge triangle – higher education, research and innovation, and business creation – across the Union.
Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement	The Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement (HE MGA) sets out the rights and obligations and the terms and conditions applicable to the implementation of the EIT grant.
Deliverable	Deliverables are tangible or intangible goods or service produced during the project implementation phase. They track the progress made towards a project’s objectives and may take the form of a report, document, software product, course, event or any other building block of a project. The deliverables specified need to fully demonstrate the project’s achievements and the judicious use of public funds.
EIT KPI	Set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) defined by the EIT that reflect the EIT operational objectives for education, entrepreneurship, and innovation. These KPIs are used to measure how effectively a KIC/project meets the objectives of the EIT.

1. Introduction

1.1. Information on the EIT

European Institute of Innovation and Technology

The European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) is a European Union body with a legal personality and a wide legal capacity accorded to legal persons under national law. The EIT was created in 2008 by the European Union (EU) to enhance Europe's global competitiveness by fostering collaboration between businesses, research institutions, and higher education organizations.

The EIT is governed by [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/695](#) (EIT Regulation), which aligns the EIT's mission with the EU's priorities and the objectives of Horizon Europe on evolving research, innovation, economic growth, job creation, global competitiveness, sustainable growth, higher education and entrepreneurship, by means of the Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs), which address specific societal challenges and are established and supported by the EIT.

The [EIT Strategic Innovation Agenda \(SIA\) 2021-2027](#) is aligned with Horizon Europe and lays down the priority fields and the strategy of the EIT for future initiatives, capacity to generate the best innovation added-value, objectives, key actions, mode of operation, expected results, impact, as well as an estimate of the resources needed for the duration of Horizon Europe.

Horizon Europe Regulation

The [Horizon Europe Regulation \(EU\) 2021/695](#) foresees that the EIT takes part in the implementation of the Horizon Europe Program in accordance with its strategic objectives for the period 2021 to 2027, as laid down in the Strategic Innovation Agenda of the EIT, and taking into account the strategic planning of Horizon Europe.

EIT and Knowledge and Innovation Community (KIC) relations

The EIT Regulation defines KICs as large-scale Institutionalised European Partnerships of higher education institutions, research organisations, companies and other stakeholders in the innovation process in the form of a strategic network, regardless of its legal form, based on joint mid- to long-term innovation planning to meet the EIT's challenges and contribute to attaining the objectives established.

According to the EIT Regulation, and without prejudice to the partnership agreements and grant agreements between the EIT and each KIC, the KICs have substantial autonomy to establish 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, taking into account the strategic planning of Horizon Europe and the strategic direction of the EIT set out in the SIA and by the Governing Board.

Contractual framework between the EIT and the KICs

KIC 28DIGITAL (formerly EIT Digital) entered into a Partnership Agreement ("PA") with the European Institute of Innovation and Technology ("EIT"), effective as of 1 January 2021 until December 31, 2024, establishing a long-term cooperation laying down the general terms and conditions under which the KIC 28DIGITAL (formerly KIC EIT Digital) must operate as an institutionalised European partnership under the Horizon Europe Program.

Following the successful completion of the PA, as demonstrated by the positive outcome of the final review of 28DIGITAL (formerly EIT Digital), the EIT and 28DIGITAL have entered into a Memorandum of Cooperation ('MoC') for a period of three years (2025-2027), starting on 1 January 2025 until 31 December 2027, in line with the Horizon Europe Framework Program for Research and Innovation.

The MoC aims to keep the KIC 28DIGITAL as an active member of the EIT Community after the expiry of the Partnership Agreement, and which includes the conditions for access to EIT competitive calls for some specific activities and transnational activities with a high Union added value and establishes the general terms and conditions governing the cooperation between the EIT and the KIC after the expiry of the Partnership Agreement.

As part of the activities supported by the MoC, 28DIGITAL together with other KICs has defined the Business Plan INNOVATION AND BUSINESS CREATION XKIC 2026-2028 (Project ID 101268805; HORIZON-EIT-2025-KIC-IBA-INBC) within which this call will function and for which the contractual arrangements are processed, and consolidated in an EIT grant for the calendar years 2026 to 2028 ("Relevant Period"), hereinafter "the EIT Grant", to the 28DIGITAL in accordance with and subject to the terms and conditions of the (M)GA.

The Grant Agreement (GA)¹ is the contractual instrument laying down the provisions concerning the implementation of the KIC activities (KIC Activity Plan, Cross-KIC activities, etc.) through grants, on an annual or multi-annual basis of up to three years with the KICs. Business plans describe the main objectives and expected results and actions taken by the KICs.

Contractual framework between the KIC and the subgrantees

In accordance with the Grant Agreement (Annex 5), the KIC launches calls (i.e. open calls or KIC partnership calls) in order to select projects or award prizes. The KIC awards a "financial support to third parties" (i.e. the so called "subgrants" and "prizes") for the implementation of these projects and signs subgrant agreements ("Financial Support Agreements") with the selected entities or consortia.

1.1.1 Innovation and Business Creation XKIC 2026-2028

The Innovation and Business Creation (INNOBC) cluster brings together six Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology to strengthen Europe's innovation ecosystem. Between 2026–2028, the consortium will support entrepreneurs, start-ups, and citizens in tackling urgent societal challenges and building a resilient, competitive, sustainable, and inclusive Europe. Its activities focus on three areas: (1) Artificial Intelligence and Robotics – helping Europe lead in ethical, human-centred AI and supporting European start-ups to grow under the EU AI Act; (2) the New European Bauhaus – promoting sustainable, inclusive and beautiful living spaces by engaging citizens, municipalities, and innovators; (3) Women in Entrepreneurship (Supernovas) – reducing gender gaps in deep-tech by training women investors and supporting female-led start-ups. By linking technology, creativity, and social innovation, the consortium will scale up start-ups, foster citizen engagement, promote diversity, and contribute to Europe's resilience and competitiveness. The cluster aims to strengthen the EIT

¹ Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement: [general-mga_horizon-euratom_en.pdf](#)

Community as a key player in Europe's innovation landscape, enhancing its visibility and impact across society, business, and policy.

AI Entrepreneurs Lab is a flagship initiative of the EIT Artificial Intelligence and Robotics Community part of the EU ApplyAI Strategy² lead by 28DIGITAL with five EIT KICs actively participating in: EIT Food, EIT Health, EIT Culture & Creativity.

1.2. Information on 28DIGITAL

1.2.1. Vision and mission

By mobilising a global multi-stakeholder platform, rooted in European values and open to the world, we turn knowledge into innovation, scale startups into global ventures, and build the next generation of digital talent to shape a fair, competitive, and human-centric digital future.

We operate in domains where digital technology and innovation drive societal progress, addressing major global challenges and delivering tangible benefits for people, businesses, and the planet.

Our focus is on areas that reflect Europe's leadership potential, advancing tech sovereignty, enhancing competitiveness, and supporting a more sustainable and resilient future.

Technologies such as AI, cybersecurity, advanced computing, and robotics are not confined to a single sector; they are powerful enablers of societal transformation, dual-use innovation, and sustainability. Their impact depends on how we develop, apply, and scale them across strategic domain.

28DIGITAL was founded upon the initiative of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT), a body of the European Union. 28DIGITAL received EUR 1.1B funding and strategic guidance from the EIT over 15 years as an EIT Knowledge and Innovation Community (KIC). Following the successful signature of a Memorandum of Cooperation, the EIT and 28DIGITAL collaborate to further boost innovation in digital transformation across Europe and beyond.

1.2.2 Strategic objectives

This activity is aligned with EIT Community & 28DIGITAL strategic domains:

a) Deep AI & Robotics Tech:

Deep Tech represents breakthrough, science-driven innovation that expands the boundaries of what is technologically possible across health, mobility, manufacturing, computing, and advanced digital infrastructures.

We are looking for consortia developing radically new technologies and scalable solutions grounded in strong research and engineering excellence. This includes novel materials, next-generation computing architectures, AI-powered systems, advanced robotics, intelligent sensing technologies, high-fidelity

² Apply AI Summit | Shaping Europe's digital future: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/apply-ai-summit>

simulation, and other enabling deep technologies with the potential to transform industries and create entirely new markets.

b) Strategic Tech

Strategic Technologies are frontier technologies aligned with the objectives of the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP)³⁴, aimed at strengthening Europe's competitiveness, resilience, and technological sovereignty.

STEP focuses on four key sectors: **digital technologies, clean technologies, biotechnology, and deep tech - related technologies**, with the goal of reducing strategic dependencies, strengthening critical value chains, and accelerating high-impact innovation with strong economic potential.

We specifically support **AI and digital technologies that are applied to and integrated within these STEP sectors**, including cybersecurity, sovereign and secure data infrastructures, AI-enabled dual-use systems, trusted digital platforms, advanced industrial and mobility systems, and clean-tech or biotech applications powered by AI.

Ventures should demonstrate either **strategic relevance for reducing EU dependencies and/or strong innovation potential with scalable industrial impact**.

³https://strategic-technologies.europa.eu/document/download/e204ce9e-0407-4f03-82f8-6f518ce12886_en?filename=C_2024_3148_F1_COMMUNICATION_FROM_COMMISSION_EN_V6_P1_3408774.PDF

⁴ https://strategic-technologies.europa.eu/document/download/6c29257c-60ce-4157-81e7-8ea827803287_en

2. Overview of key information on the call

Call reference number, acronym	AI Entrepreneurs Lab 2026 - Startup Call
Call opening and deadline for applications	Call publication / opening: 01 September 2026 Deadline for applications: 21 October 2026, 17:00 CET All applications must be submitted via the official submission platform before the deadline.
Evaluation and implementation timeline (indicative)	Admissibility and eligibility screening: 16-21 October 2026 Stage 1 evaluation of applications: 21-25 October 2026 Communication of Top 15 results to applicants: 26 October 2026 AI Entrepreneurs Lab Bootcamp: 09-13 November 2026, one week, in person Final Pitches (DemoDay) & winner selection: 13 November 2026 Tentative completion of the programme: 20 November, 2026
Maximum EIT funding allocated to this call	The maximum EIT funding allocated to the Awards under this Call is up to EUR 50,000. Up to five (5) winning teams may receive an Award of EUR 10,000 each, subject to the quality of the applications, jury decision, signature of the required agreements and availability of budget. Travel and accommodation support for the Top 15 Bootcamp participants may be provided separately, subject to the rules communicated by 28DIGITAL and budget availability. Funding condition: this collaboration is contingent upon receiving funding from the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT). If the necessary funding is not secured, 28DIGITAL reserves the right to delay, modify, reduce, or cancel any collaboration, award decision or agreement.
List of call documents	Intranet / programme page with links to all documents, templates and more information - Open Call Document - Application form as available on the submission platform - AI Entrepreneurs Lab 2026 Participant Support Agreement template - AI Entrepreneurs Lab 2026 Award Agreement template - SAFE letter / agreement template, - Declaration of honor template, if applicable
List of reference documents (with links)	- EIT Impact Framework (2022-2027) with codes.pdf - Annotated Grant Agreement - 28DIGITAL communication and branding guidelines - EIT Community AI & Robotics reference material, if applicable
Link to the submission portal	- Programme webpage: https://ai.eitcommunity.eu - Submission platform: EIT AI Entrepreneurs Lab – Fill in form Applicants are responsible for ensuring that the application is complete and submitted before the deadline.

Topics to be addressed	Development and support of early-stage AI and robotics entrepreneurial projects in the following domains: - AI and Robotics - AI agents and autonomous decision systems - Edge AI and AI infrastructure - Robotics intelligence and autonomous robotic systems - Trustworthy, explainable and secure AI - Foundation models, generative AI and domain-specific AI systems - Industrial AI deployment and STEP-relevant applications
Contact point Q&A	For questions contact: <ai@eitcommunity.eu> The FAQ containing general questions in anonymized form will be made available on the official programme page and updated during the submission period.
Further information to interested applicants	Information sessions, Pre bootcamp Onboarding and outreach events may be organised before and during the application period. Details will be published on the official programme page.

3. Description of the subject matter of the call

3.1. Purpose and scope of activities

AI Entrepreneurs Lab 2026 is a venture programme operated by 28DIGITAL under the INNOBC - EIT Community AI & Robotics framework. The programme supports individuals and small teams with strong AI and robotics ideas and helps them turn an early concept into a validated venture plan and first market-ready product direction.

The programme is designed for graduates and early-stage founders with strong technical or research-based ideas who need structured support to define a commercial proposition, gather customer evidence, shape a first product direction, improve communication, prepare for investors and define a credible 30/60/90-day execution roadmap.

The call contributes to the EIT mission of strengthening Knowledge Triangle Integration by connecting education, research and innovation with business creation. It also supports 28DIGITAL's focus on Deep Tech, Strategic Tech and technology-driven ventures with European relevance, scalability and societal or economic value.

The AI Entrepreneurs Lab 2026 focuses on Deep AI and Robotics in the following domains:

- AI agents, multi-agent systems and autonomous decision systems.
- Edge AI, on-device intelligence and AI infrastructure optimisation.
- Robotics intelligence, perception, manipulation and autonomous robotic systems.
- Trustworthy, explainable, secure and privacy-preserving AI.
- Foundation models, generative AI, multimodal AI and domain-specific models.
- Synthetic and data-centric AI, data quality engineering and model optimisation.
- Industrial AI deployment in healthcare and pharmaceuticals, mobility, transport and automotive, robotics, manufacturing, engineering and construction, climate and environment, energy, agri-food, security and

space, electronic communications, advanced sensing dual-use and cultural, creative & media sectors or other STEP-relevant sectors.

Cross-domain ideas are welcome where AI or robotics is central to the proposed solution and where the applicant can demonstrate a clear problem, credible technical direction and potential pathway towards market adoption.

3.2. Main requirements for applicants

The call is open to individuals or teams of up to two (2) persons applying in a personal capacity, not as representatives of an employer, university or research organisation, unless otherwise accepted by 28DIGITAL under the final call conditions.

The target profile is Master and PhD students or graduates with strong AI and robotics ideas. bachelor-level graduates may apply where the application demonstrates exceptional founder potential, technical relevance and fit with the programme.

Applicants must be residents of, or established in, one of the eligible countries listed below, unless additional eligible Horizon Europe Associated Countries are confirmed before publication of the call:

- EU Member States: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden.
- Selected Horizon Europe Associated Countries: Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Türkiye and Ukraine, plus any additional countries confirmed as eligible before publication of the call.

Applicants must:

- Submit one application only.
- Present an AI-driven and/or robotics-driven idea in a Deep AI and Robotics domain, or a recently incorporated startup at pre-market launch stage.
- Demonstrate that AI and/or robotics is central to the proposed venture concept and not merely a peripheral feature or label.
- Submit the required application form, CV(s) and short creative presentation.
- Confirm that they hold the rights necessary to submit the application and that the application does not infringe third-party rights.
- Comply with the applicable admissibility, eligibility, exclusion and ethical requirements described in this Call.

Age limit: While the programme is primarily aimed at young professionals and early-stage founders/entrepreneurs/ideators, there is no strict age limit. As an indicative guideline, applicants up to 35 years of age at the application deadline are particularly encouraged to apply.

A Participant Identification Code (PIC) is required before signature of the Award Agreement. Applicants are not required to hold a PIC at the time of application. Selected winners, or the legal entity through which the venture is incorporated, must register in the EU Funding and Tenders Portal and obtain a validated PIC before the Award can be paid. 28DIGITAL will provide registration guidance to selected applicants.

3.3. Main requirements for project implementation

3.3.1 Project duration

AI Entrepreneurs Lab 2026 is divided into two main stages:

- Stage 1: Selection Phase. This stage covers application screening, eligibility checks and evaluation of admissible applications, resulting in the selection of up to fifteen (15) participants or teams for the Bootcamp.
- Stage 2: Bootcamp Phase: This stage consists of an intensive one-week in-person Bootcamp, the Final day (DemoDay) will include final pitches and jury evaluation. Up to five (5) winning teams may be selected to receive the EUR 10,000 Award each.

The exact timeline and key dates are specified in Chapter 2 and Annex 1. 28DIGITAL may adapt dates, venues or implementation format where required by operational constraints, funding availability or force majeure circumstances.

3.3.2. Project implementation

Project implementation under the AI Entrepreneurs Lab 2026 shall be carried out under the supervision of 28DIGITAL and/or the appointed programme team. Gender balance, cultural diversity, mutual respect, and inclusion are core principles of the programme and shall be promoted throughout all programme activities. The programme team and participants are expected to foster an inclusive, respectful, and collaborative environment, promote gender-balanced participation and cultural diversity, and ensure equal access to programme opportunities throughout implementation.

The programme may include expert mentoring, founder readiness training, customer discovery, commercial model testing, pitch development, investor readiness, legal and trustworthy AI considerations, peer-learning sessions, partner and investor introductions, and Final Day preparation.

3.3.2.1 Stage 1:-Selection Phase

Stage 1 is open to all admissible and eligible applications submitted before the deadline. Applications are reviewed through a light, but structured evaluation process focused on founder potential, problem definition, ambition, AI and robotics relevance, market need and ability to benefit from the Bootcamp.

Short online interviews may be requested where needed to clarify the application, assess founder/entrepreneur motivation or distinguish between closely ranked applicants. The outcome of Stage 1 is a ranked list, the selection of up to fifteen (15) participants or teams for Stage 2 and, where relevant, a reserve list.

Selected participants will receive confirmation from 28DIGITAL and will be required to sign the AI Entrepreneurs Lab 2026 Participant Support Agreement, including acceptance of the Rules and Regulations. Each team member must complete the required signatures within three (3) working days of receiving the electronic signature request, unless another deadline is communicated by 28DIGITAL.

3.3.2.2 Stage 2: AI Entrepreneurs Lab Bootcamp and Demo Day

Stage 2 is open only to the Top 15 participants or teams selected through Stage 1. The Bootcamp is an intensive one-week in-person programme designed to help participants turn an early AI or robotics idea into a validated, market-facing venture concept.

The Bootcamp may include the following components:

- Entrepreneur mindset, critical thinking, assumption testing and counterfactual thinking.
- Entrepreneurship fundamentals, commercial model design, startup funding and communication.

- Customer discovery, market testing, pilot planning and first product direction.
- AI Act readiness, trustworthy AI, legal considerations, founder agreements and trust as a business value.
- Feedback from mentors, startups, SMEs, corporates, investors and other experts.
- Final pitch preparation, clear storytelling and a 30/60/90-day execution roadmap.

At Demo Day, each participant or team presents the venture concept developed during the Bootcamp. The Jury evaluates the idea, progress during the Bootcamp, customer evidence, venture readiness, communication quality and ability to use the EUR 10,000 Award for concrete venture progress.

Up to five (5) winning entrepreneurs/teams may be selected. Fewer than five (5) Awards may be granted if the Jury determines that fewer teams meet the required quality threshold.

3.3.2.2.1 Award amount and winner obligations

The Award consists of a cash prize of EUR 10,000 per winning team. The maximum Award envelope under this Call is EUR 50,000. The Award is a single payment and cannot be divided into separate components, unless otherwise required under the final award documentation.

Winning teams are expected to represent the AI Entrepreneurs Lab 2026 at the EU Apply AI Summit in Brussels on 17 November 2026, subject to confirmation of the Community's participation and of the selected teams by the European Commission. Where participation is confirmed, winning teams shall attend the Summit and present their venture at the dedicated Community booth. 28DIGITAL will communicate confirmation and the practical arrangements without delay following notification by the European Commission. Non-attendance for reasons other than documented force majeure may be taken into account in the assessment of compliance with the Call conditions under point (iv) below.

Winning teams fully complied teams will receive confirmation from 28DIGITAL and will be required to sign the AI Entrepreneurs Lab 2026 Award Agreement, including acceptance of the applicable Rules and Regulations and any additional award conditions. Each team member must complete the required signatures within three (3) working days of receiving the electronic signature request, unless another deadline is communicated by 28DIGITAL.

Payment is conditional upon: (i) selection as a winner; (ii) signature of the required agreements; (iii) provision of required payment information; (iv) continued compliance with the Call conditions; and (v) availability of EIT funding. Prize winners are responsible for any applicable taxes, wire transfer fees or other costs associated with payment of the Award.

3.3.2.2.2 Equity commitment / SAFE mechanism

Participation in AI Entrepreneurs Lab 2026 may involve a financial sustainability mechanism for winning teams only, structured through a SAFE (Simple Agreement for Future Equity) letter or an equivalent future equity / participation instrument. The mechanism is subject to legal confirmation and the final template approved by 28DIGITAL.

If applied, the equity participation shall be below or equal one percent (<1%) and shall apply only to winning teams that accept the Award. The specific terms, including timing, conversion mechanics, valuation cap, discount, pro-rata rights and incorporation requirements, will be set out in the Award Agreement and/or SAFE letter. Where winning teams have not yet incorporated, they may be required to incorporate a legal entity within a defined period after selection or before conversion, as specified in the final legal documents.

Applicants should note that acceptance of the Award may be conditional upon acceptance of the applicable SAFE or equivalent participation terms, if confirmed in the final call documents.

3.3.3. Deliverables

Participants shall submit the following deliverables during programme implementation, in the formats and deadlines specified by 28DIGITAL:

- Completed application package, including application form, CV(s) and video pitch / creative presentation.
- Participation and attendance records for mandatory Bootcamp components.
- Final pitch deck and Demo Day presentation materials.
- Customer discovery and market feedback summary.
- First marketable product direction, pilot-ready product concept or product validation plan.
- 30/60/90-day venture roadmap.
- Documentation required for Award payment, KPI reporting and follow-up impact monitoring.
- Incorporation documentation, where applicable or required under the Award Agreement / SAFE mechanism.

3.3.4. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

AI Entrepreneurs Lab 2026 contributes to relevant EIT Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), including but not limited to:

- Supported teams, startups or entrepreneurial projects.
- Innovation launched or prepared for market launch.
- New venture creation and incorporation, where applicable.
- Investment raised, pilot agreements, commercial traction or customer validation evidence.
- Participation of women-led, mixed-gender and RIS-country teams, where applicable.

Participants shall support the collection and provision of evidence necessary for KPI reporting during and after programme completion.

3.3.5. Monitoring and reporting

Participants shall comply with 28DIGITAL's monitoring and reporting requirements. Monitoring may include participation tracking, milestone verification, deliverable review, evaluation documentation, KPI evidence collection and follow-up impact surveys.

Participants may be required to provide follow-up information after programme completion, including information on incorporation, investment, revenue, jobs created, pilots, users, customers, product development, market launch and other commercialisation progress. 28DIGITAL reserves the right to request additional documentation to verify reported achievements.

Failure to comply with monitoring and reporting obligations may result in reduction, suspension, withdrawal or recovery of support, in accordance with the relevant agreements.

3.3.6. Fast-Tracking conditions and requirements

28DIGITAL may apply fast-track mechanisms for strong participants where appropriate. Fast-tracking may include introductions, eligibility confirmation or priority consideration for relevant 28DIGITAL or EIT Community opportunities, subject to the rules of those programmes and available budget.

Potential fast-track pathways may include AI Growth Studio, AI Founders Club, AI Factory X, Open Innovation Factory, AI Entrepreneurs Lab or other relevant EIT Community AI & Robotics initiatives. Fast-tracking does not create an entitlement to funding, selection or participation in any future programme.

4. Financial aspects of the call

4.1. KIC funding

The total Award budget allocated to AI Entrepreneurs Lab 2026 amounts to up to EUR 50,000, subject to the availability of funding from the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT). Financial support under this Call consists of prize-based funding: up to five (5) Awards of EUR 10,000 each.

The number of selected winners shall depend on the available budget, the quality of applications and the final Jury decision. 28DIGITAL reserves the right not to award all available funds and/or to adjust the number of Awards subject to the results of the evaluation and the availability of funding.

4.2. Co-funding rate

No financial co-funding is required from applicants, participants or winning teams under this Call.

4.3. Payment arrangements

Financial support under this Call is provided in the form of prizes and is not based on reimbursement of actual costs. The Award shall be paid upon signature of the required Award Agreement and, where applicable, SAFE letter or equivalent participation instrument.

All payments are subject to compliance with the Call conditions, monitoring and reporting obligations, contractual obligations and availability of EIT funding. Winners shall be responsible for any taxes, fees or other costs associated with receipt of the Award.

4.4 Financial sustainability requirements

In alignment with 28DIGITAL's financial sustainability strategy, winning teams may be required to enter into a SAFE or equivalent future equity / participation instrument with 28DIGITAL. If applied, the equity participation shall be below or equal one percent (<1%) and shall be limited to winning teams accepting the Award.

The specific financial sustainability mechanism, if any, will be set out in the final Award Agreement and SAFE letter / agreement template and remains subject to legal confirmation before applicant release.

4.5 Cost eligibility

As financial support is awarded in the form of prizes, no cost reporting by winners is required for the EUR 10,000 Award, unless otherwise specified in the final Award Agreement. The Award is not a reimbursement of actual costs.

Any travel, accommodation or subsistence support related to the Bootcamp shall be governed by separate rules communicated by 28DIGITAL, subject to eligibility, budget availability and applicable internal procedures.

5. Call criteria

5.1. Admissibility

Applications must comply with all admissibility requirements. Requirements:

- Be submitted before the call deadline via the official submission platform.
- Be submitted in English using the forms and formats provided by 28DIGITAL.
- Be complete and include all required information and mandatory supporting documents.
- Be readable, accessible and printable.
- Respect any page, duration or format limits indicated in the application form or platform.

Any applications submitted after the deadline will be inadmissible. Applicants are advised not to wait until the final hours before the deadline, as no claims will be accepted due to last-minute submission failure, technical congestion or incomplete submissions.

5.2 Eligibility

Only applications satisfying all eligibility criteria shall proceed to evaluation. The call is open to eligible individuals and teams of up to two (2) persons, in line with Section 3.2.

Applicants must be resident in one of the eligible countries listed in Section 3.2, must submit only one application, and must present a venture idea or early-stage project in Deep AI and Robotics. Applicants that are already incorporated may apply only if they are at pre-market launch stage and meet the final eligibility requirements of the Call.

The programme is primarily intended for Master and PhD students or graduates. Bachelor-level graduates may be accepted where the application demonstrates exceptional fit. Age limit and incorporation requirements remain subject to final legal confirmation before publication.

5.3 Exclusion criteria

Applicants will be excluded from participation in the Call and from the Award if they are in one of the situations referred to in Article 138(1) of the EU Financial Regulation or otherwise subject to exclusion under applicable EU rules.

Applicants may also be excluded if they provide false or misleading information, fail to provide required information, breach eligibility rules, are subject to EU restrictive measures, or present unresolved conflicts of interest that cannot be remedied. 28DIGITAL may request a Declaration of Honour or other supporting documents to verify compliance.

5.4 Selection criteria

5.4.1 Stage 1: Selection of the Top 15

Stage 1 evaluates mission, founder potential and AI/robotics relevance. The Jury is looking for future entrepreneurs/founders with ambitious, technically credible and market-relevant ideas and the personal qualities to grow through the programme. A full business plan is not required at this stage.

5.4.2 Stage 2: Selection of up to 5 winners

Stage 2 evaluates execution and progress during the Bootcamp. The Jury assesses how much the participants advanced, whether they engaged meaningfully with customers, mentors, partners or investors, whether the venture concept became more marketable and pilot-ready, and whether the team can use the Award for concrete venture progress.

5.5 Award criteria

5.5.1 Stage 1: Founder Selection Phase

Criterion	Maximum score and focus
Excellence	15 points - clarity and significance of the problem; ambition of the vision; centrality, novelty and defensibility of the AI or robotics approach.
Impact	5 points - relevance of the problem, potential market or societal value, EU / strategic relevance and potential to become a scalable venture.
Quality and efficiency of implementation	10 points - founder-problem fit, motivation, coachability, self-awareness, ability to learn fast and benefit from the Bootcamp.
Total	30 points

Applications may be ranked based on the total Stage 1 score, with priority given to proposals that promote gender balance in the event of equal scores. A reserve list may be established. Where necessary, 28DIGITAL may invite shortlisted applicants to participate in short online interviews.

Minimum thresholds: Excellence 9/15; Impact 3/5; Quality and efficiency of implementation 6/10; overall minimum 18/30. Applications failing any individual threshold are not eligible for selection regardless of total score.

5.5.2 Stage 2: Bootcamp and Demo Day

Criterion	Maximum score and focus
Excellence	20 points - quality of the AI / robotics concept, technical clarity, evidence-based progress, learning delta and ability to articulate what changed during the Bootcamp.
Impact	45 points - depth and quality of customer engagement, market need, pilot potential, EU relevance, endorsements from mentors, customers, investors or partners, and path to first users, customers or partners.
Quality and efficiency of implementation	35 points - venture readiness, first marketable product direction, team execution capacity, commercial assumptions, 30/60/90-day roadmap, pitch quality and ability to answer hard questions.
Total	100 points

The Jury may select up to five (5) winners, subject to the quality threshold, ranking and available budget. In the event of a tie, priority may first be given to proposals that promote gender balance. If the tie persists, proposals will be ranked based on the higher Impact score, followed by the higher Quality and Efficiency of Implementation score.

Minimum thresholds: Excellence 12/20; Impact 27/45; Quality and efficiency of implementation 21/35; overall minimum 65/100. The same rule applies: failure of any individual threshold excludes the application from the Award.

6. Evaluation procedure

6.1 Admissibility and eligibility, exclusion and selection stages

Following the application deadline, 28DIGITAL will perform admissibility and eligibility checks, exclusion checks and selection-stage preparation. Only admissible and eligible applications shall proceed to evaluation.

If minor clarification is needed, 28DIGITAL may request additional information from applicants. Such requests do not create an obligation to accept incomplete or non-compliant applications.

6.2 Evaluation of proposals

6.2.1 Stage 1: Entrepreneur Selection Phase

Stage 1 applications will be evaluated by an evaluation panel appointed by 28DIGITAL, composed of at least three (3) independent external experts with complementary profiles in AI and robotics, entrepreneurship and venture assessment. 28DIGITAL carries out admissibility, eligibility and exclusion checks, and is represented on the evaluation panel by one (1) scoring member alongside the independent external experts. A consensus meeting might be held to resolve significant divergence between individual scores; it does not replace independent scoring. All members sign confidentiality and conflict-of-interest declarations before evaluation begins. External experts hold no less than 75% of the scoring weight.

The result of Stage 1 is a ranked list, the selection of up to fifteen (15) participants or teams for Stage 2, and, where applicable, a reserve list.

6.2.2 Stage 2: Bootcamp and Demo Day

Stage 2 will be evaluated by a Jury appointed by 28DIGITAL. The Jury shall include at least three (3) reviewers, including two (2) external experts. The Jury may include founders, investors, AI and robotics experts, SMEs, corporates, accelerators, incubators or other ecosystem representatives. 28DIGITAL carries out admissibility, eligibility and exclusion checks, and is represented on the evaluation panel by one (1) scoring member alongside the independent external experts. External experts hold no less than 75% of the scoring weight.

Jury members shall sign confidentiality and conflict-of-interest declarations before evaluation begins. Any Jury member with a direct or indirect conflict concerning an applicant must recuse themselves from that applicant's evaluation. External experts sign confidentiality and conflict-of-interest declarations before evaluation begins.

6.2.3 Assessment methodology

The assessment of proposals will be carried out in accordance with the award criteria defined in Section 5.5. Evaluators shall score each criterion independently and may provide qualitative comments justifying the assigned scores.

Unless otherwise specified in the evaluation briefing, the following 0-5 interpretation scale may be used for sub-criteria:

- 0 - Insufficient: the proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing information.
- 1 - Poor: the criterion is inadequately addressed and serious weaknesses are present.
- 2 - Fair: the criterion is broadly addressed but significant weaknesses remain.
- 3 - Good: the criterion is addressed well, with some shortcomings.
- 4 - Very Good: the criterion is addressed very well, with only minor shortcomings.

- 5 - Excellent: the proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects and any shortcomings are minor.

After individual evaluation, the panel or Jury may hold a consensus meeting to discuss individual scores, agree final scores and establish the ranked list. The consensus score shall constitute the official evaluation result.

6.2.4 Results of the evaluation: award, reserve list

28DIGITAL reserves the right to establish a reserve list for proposals passing all thresholds but not selected due to budget, cohort-size or operational limitations. If a selected applicant withdraws, fails to sign the required agreements, or becomes ineligible, 28DIGITAL may invite the next-ranked applicant from the reserve list.

The Stage 1 reserve list remains valid until the start of the Bootcamp. The Stage 2 reserve list remains valid for sixty (60) calendar days from the date of the Demo Day. After these periods the reserve lists lapse and no further invitations will be issued.

6.3 Communication of evaluation results to applicants

6.3.1 Communication of evaluation results

All applicants will be informed in writing of the outcome of the evaluation process. Successful applicants will receive instructions regarding signature of the Participant Support Agreement, Award Agreement and SAFE letter / agreement, where applicable. Failure to sign the required documents within the specified timeframe may result in withdrawal of selection or Award.

6.4 Publication of recipients of prizes

28DIGITAL shall make available on a dedicated page of its website information on recipients of prizes, having due regard to the requirements of confidentiality, security and protection of personal data. The information may include the recipient name, country, amount awarded and subject of the Award, in line with applicable rules.

6.5 Appeal process

28DIGITAL will address, in good faith and in a timely manner, any appeal relating to the outcome of the evaluation process. Appeals must be factually grounded and submitted through the channel indicated by 28DIGITAL within the communicated deadline.

Appeals must be submitted within ten (10) calendar days of the date of notification of the evaluation result, through the channel indicated in the notification. 28DIGITAL will acknowledge receipt within five (5) working days and communicate a reasoned decision within twenty (20) calendar days of receipt.

The grounds for appeal are limited to process errors, technical problems beyond the control of applicants, or obvious human or mechanical errors made by 28DIGITAL staff. Expert scoring and qualitative assessment cannot be re-evaluated through the appeal process.

7. Other terms and conditions

7.1 Acceptance of the call conditions

28DIGITAL reserves the right to make reasonable amendments and additions to the call conditions. Amendments and additions to the call conditions shall be valid only before the submission deadline, and if

made available to all potential applicants at the same time on the top of the call page of the AI Entrepreneurs Lab 2026.

28DIGITAL may extend the call application period in case no sufficient number and/or quality of applications are received, or if the applications do not meet the admissibility, eligibility, exclusion and selection criteria.

By submitting the application form, the applicant agrees to the present call conditions. Applicants agree that they have no legal entitlement to funding.

7.2 Cancellation of the call

28DIGITAL reserves the right to cancel the call at any time before the signature of the Prize Agreement(s) without the obligation to compensate applicants, in particular where its objectives can no longer be met, provided that the applicants are informed in a transparent manner in writing as follows:

- If the cancellation takes place before the award: on the call page of the 28DIGITAL website.
- If the cancellation takes place following the communication of the results to the applicants: during the standstill period or any time before the signature of the Prize Agreement in writing directly to the selected applicants.

7.3 Data protection

28DIGITAL ensures that any processing of personal data shall be performed in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016, on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and in accordance with Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation). As a data subject, you have the right of access, the right to rectification, the right to erasure, the right to restrict processing, the right to data portability, the right to object, and the right not to be subject to a decision based solely on automated processing. If you have a question about personal data processing or want to exercise your data subject rights, you can contact our Data Protection Officer at privacy@28DIGITAL.eu

The collected personal data will be used solely for the evaluation of the applications and the conduct of the call process. The data controller is the EIT AI & Robotics Community Team.

Personal data will be deleted 5 years after the announcement of the results of the call in case of unsuccessful applications and 7 years for successful applicants.

By submitting your application to this call, you consent that 28DIGITAL will collect, transfer, process, store, and delete your data in accordance with the aforementioned conditions.

For more information on the processing of your personal data, please consult the privacy statement of 28DIGITAL at <https://28DIGITAL.eu/legal-notice>

7.4 Confidentiality

28DIGITAL undertakes to use any confidential information shared by the applicants solely for the purposes of the evaluation process.

Confidential information shall mean data and/or information (in any form) that is proprietary to, or possessed by, the applicants and not generally known to the public, or that has not yet been revealed whether in tangible or intangible form, that is identified as confidential in writing or when disclosed orally.

Confidential information included in the application form must be expressly labelled by the applicant as such in the form. As regards confidential information expressly labelled as such in the call process, 28DIGITAL undertakes to (i) not disclose them in any way and any form, without the prior written authorization of the applicant; and (ii) not to use them for purposes other than those strictly necessary for participation in the call.

Confidential information may be shared among 28DIGITAL and its subsidiaries solely for the purposes of the call process. 28DIGITAL undertakes to impose this confidentiality obligation on its employees and the employees of its subsidiaries and its collaborators, as well as on independent experts and all subjects who, by virtue of participating in the conduct of the call, including as members of the Evaluation Committee, may have access to such confidential data and information.

The applicants agree that data and information regarding the selected projects' implementation (e.g. success stories) not labelled as confidential may be disclosed in connection with the activities of 28DIGITAL.

7.5 Avoidance of conflict of interest

28DIGITAL is committed to ensure the avoidance of conflict of interest (regarding all actors) and comply with the principles of transparency, non-discrimination and sound financial management.

Measures to avoid potential conflict of interest or unequal treatment of applicants are ensured including through appropriate conflict of interest declaration and assessment process, established written communication channels and independent and fair complaints/redress procedures.

In case an applicant becomes aware of a potential conflict of interest affecting the conduct of the call process, it shall notify 28DIGITAL of the conflict of interest without any delay.

7.6 Ethics and values

The proposal must comply with:

- ethical principles (including the highest standards of research integrity) and
- applicable EU, international and national law, including the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and its Supplementary Protocols.

No financial support/EIT funding can be granted, within or outside the EU, for activities that are prohibited in all Member States. No financial support/EIT funding can be granted in a Member State for an activity which is forbidden in that Member State.

Please refer to the financial support agreement for further requirements.

7.7 Intellectual property rights

Applicants retain full and exclusive ownership of their prior information and intellectual property rights. By submitting their application, applicants confirm that they own or lawfully hold, and have secured or will secure in due time, all rights and permissions necessary to use all elements of the innovative product or service included in their application, or that they will take appropriate measures to secure and protect such rights during the project. Applicants agree to indemnify and hold harmless 28DIGITAL, the EIT, and/or any assignee or affiliate from any third-party allegations or claims of intellectual property rights infringement by the product or service of applicants. Applicants shall have the right to further develop, use and license their intellectual property rights for creating, making, marketing, and distributing products, services, and technology. Applicants agree to respect the IPR (Intellectual Property Rights) Rules (Article 16) of the [Model Grant Agreement](#) and Article 10 of the Financial Support Agreement (Common Subgrant Agreement Model).

7.8 Withdrawal of the funding – Recovery of undue amounts

28DIGITAL may withdraw the funding after its award and recover all payments made in line with the provisions of the Financial Support Agreement (Article 7.4.), including in the following cases:

- In case the applicant committed substantial errors, irregularities or fraud.

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In case the applicant committed serious breach of obligations under the Financial Support Agreement or during its award (including non-compliance with the call conditions, submission of false information, failure to provide required information, etc.).

- It is established that the awarded applicants were not eligible or should have been excluded.

7.9 Checks, reviews, audits and investigations

28DIGITAL retains the right to initiate checks, reviews and audit on an applicant that has been awarded funding, in order to verify compliance with the requirements of the call conditions and of the legal and contractual framework referred to above.

28DIGITAL may request any information and data from applicants that have been awarded funding for 5 years after completion for these purposes, as well as in relation to monitoring by the EIT.

In accordance with the Grant Agreement between the EIT and the KIC as well as the Financial Support Agreement, the EIT and/or the Commission, the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF), the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) and the Court of Auditors may carry out checks, reviews, audits and investigations in relation to the call and the implementation of the projects.

7.10 Communication, Dissemination and Promotion

There is no requirement for a formal dissemination plan for participating startups. However, all teams are required to participate in media and reporting activities related to the 28DIGITAL AI Entrepreneurs Lab AI Entrepreneurs Lab. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- All teams will be asked to provide, during the Bootcamp, a 500-character description (without spaces) in English. This description may be made available to the media and may be released publicly, either in part or in its entirety.
- All teams may be requested to participate in media interviews related to the 28DIGITAL AI Entrepreneurs Lab and when requested by the AI Entrepreneurs Lab Committee. Where possible, the 28DIGITAL AI Entrepreneurs Lab organisers will provide media coaching and mentoring prior to such engagements.
- All teams may be asked to provide quotes and/or content for press releases related to the 28DIGITAL Venture Incubation Program, when requested by the AI Entrepreneurs Lab Committee.
- Teams must display the 28DIGITAL logo together with the following text on their website (if applicable), in a visible location.
- Relevant communication guidelines will be shared with the teams during the program.
- Participation in media and press opportunities does not require teams to disclose any proprietary



or confidential business information. The AI Entrepreneurs Lab Committee agrees to provide consultation to any team, upon request, to avoid such disclosures while participating in press-related activities.

- The 28DIGITAL AI Entrepreneurs Lab will conduct at least one annual impact survey, which all participants are obliged to complete. The survey may request information including, but not limited to, jobs created, financing raised, revenue generated, and other relevant impact indicators. This reporting obligation will apply for a period of seven (7) years following participation in the program.

28DIGITAL will use the collected information in aggregate form only. Any discrete or individual use of the data will require prior approval from the participant concerned.

Visibility: The European Flag and Funding Statement

Before engaging in a communication or dissemination activity expected to have a major media impact, the partners must inform 28DIGITAL.

Visibility: Unless otherwise agreed with 28DIGITAL, communication activities of the partners related to the Activity (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 28DIGITAL must acknowledge the EU support and display the European flag (emblem) and funding statement (translated into local languages where appropriate). Other allowed layouts/backgrounds can be found in the 28DIGITAL Intranet.

The emblem must remain distinct and separate and cannot be modified by adding other visual marks, brands or text. Apart from the emblem, no other visual identity or logo may be used to highlight the EU support. When displayed in association with other logos (e.g. logos of partners), the emblem must be displayed at least as prominently and visibly as the other logos. For the purposes of their obligations under this section, the partners may use the emblem without first obtaining approval from 28DIGITAL. This does

not, however, give them the right to exclusive use. Moreover, they may not appropriate the emblem or any similar trademark or logo, either by registration or by any other means.

Quality of Information: Disclaimer

Any communication or dissemination activity related to the Innovation Activity must use factually accurate information.

Moreover, it must indicate the following disclaimer (translated into local languages where appropriate):

“Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or 28DIGITAL. Neither the European Union nor 28DIGITAL can be held responsible for them.”

If a beneficiary breaches any of its obligations under this Article, the grant may be reduced.

7.11 Applicable law

The present call is governed by the applicable European Union legal framework (i.e. in particular the [EIT Regulation](#)⁵, the [EU Financial Regulation](#)⁶, the [Horizon Europe Regulation](#)⁷), supplemented if necessary by the national law of Belgium.

The applicants agree to observe the obligations outlined in the related agreements signed between the EIT and 28DIGITAL. Applicants agree to comply with the terms of the Model Prize Agreement between successful applicants and 28DIGITAL, available as an Annex.

7.12 Settlement of disputes

All disputes arising out of or in connection with this Agreement, which cannot be solved amicably, shall be finally settled before the courts of Brussels.

⁵ Regulation (EU) 2021/819

⁶ Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/2509

⁷ Regulation (EU) 2021/695

Annex 1 – Timeline

Timeline:

Action	Date
Call publication / submission system opens	01 September 2026
Information session	25 September 2026
Application deadline	21 October, 17:00 CET
Admissibility and eligibility screening	16-21 October 2026
Stage 1 evaluation of applications	21-25 October 2026
Communication of Top 15 results	26 October 2026
Participant Support Agreement signature deadline	Within three (3) working days after electronic signature request
AI Entrepreneurs Lab Bootcamp	09-13 November 2026- one-week in-person Bootcamp
Demo Day and winner announcement	13 November 2026
Award Agreement / SAFE letter signature deadline	Within three (3) working days after electronic signature request
Award payment	Within three (3) weeks after completed signatures and payment information, subject to funding availability
Post-programme monitoring and impact follow-up	Ongoing after programme completion