Open call for proposals

Factory X

2026-2027

(INNOVATION AND BUSINESS CREATION XKIC 2026-2028)

28DIGITAL

Brussels, November 2026

https://28DIGITAL.eu

HISTORY OF CHANGES			
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		Added KPI EITHE02.4 as mandatory KPI	17
		Section numbering updated	26,30
		EU restrictions updated	25
		Minimum Threshold for each sub-dimension	28 ff.
		Evaluation questions updated	29
		MC Gate section reviewed and updated	29-32
		Scoring scale adjusted	32
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		Registered applicants will be informed of call amendments by email, in addition to the call page	35
		GDPR reference corrected	35
		Communication section updated	38
		Typos corrected	5, 6, 17, 26
		Wording adjustments	7, 10, 15, 26, 32, 38, 40

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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) 2021/819 (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

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 being processed, and will be 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 Business 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.

The Grant Agreement 2026-2027 between the EIT and 28DIGITAL enters into force on January 1, 2026 once signed.

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 five 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

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

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

Factory X is a flagship initiative of the EIT Artificial Intelligence and Robotics Community lead by 28DIGITAL with four EIT KICs actively participating in: 28DIGITAL, 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, defence and 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 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.

This program is fully aligned with 28DIGITAL's strategy, serving as a key pipeline for high-potential ventures that demonstrate strong innovation capacity, market scalability, and environmental, societal and economic impact. Hence, this initiative also builds on the EU Startup and Scaleup Strategy by fostering European competitiveness and innovativeness of the digital ecosystem, ensuring that public support effectively leverages funding with purpose for long-term impact.

2. About the Call

Call reference number, acronym	Factory X 2026-2027
Call opening and deadline for applications	**Call publication / opening:** November 23, 2026 **Deadline for applications:** There will be one cut-off to evaluate and select proposals and launch the activities. Cut-off date will be January 18, 2027. **See Annex for Cut-Off specific Deadlines**
Evaluation and implementation timeline (indicative)	Cut-Off: January 18, 2027 Evaluation of proposals: February 2027 & March 2027 Start of the projects: April 1, 2027 End of the projects: December 31, 2027
Maximum EIT funding allocated to this call	The maximum EIT funding allocated to this Call is up to EUR 1,800,000 distributed. Up to 2 projects may be awarded, subject to the quality of the proposals and availability of budget. 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, we reserve the right to delay, modify, or cancel any collaboration agreements. Furthermore, we may adjust agreements based on changes in circumstances or the availability of funding.
List of call documents	Intranet Page with all documents/templates and more information for registered applicants • Open Call Document • Application form as available on the submission platform • Declaration of Honor template • Financial Support Agreement template • Internal Agreement for Financial Support template • Share Transfer Agreement template • 28DIGITAL Conflict of Interest Policy
List of reference documents (with links)	• EIT Impact Framework (2022-2027) with codes.pdf • Annotated Grant Agreement
Link to the submission portal	• **Step 1:** register your organisation in the EU Funding & tender opportunities portal to obtain the nine-digit Participant Identification Code (PIC number). If you do not know if your organisation already has a PIC number, you can verify directly on the EU Portal (click here) whether your organisation is already registered.

	• **Step 2:** register all participants organizations as a 28DIGITAL partners (preliminary registration) and the user that will access to the submission system. Become a partner page. • **Step 3:** access to the Factory X 2026-2027 page to get additional information and access the submission system. Link to the intranet page with access to submission platform of the call
Scope	Development or support of innovation projects in these topics: • AI • Robotics
Contact point Q&A	For questions contact ai@eitcommunity.eu The FAQ containing general questions (in an anonymized form) made by the applicants within the submission period can be found here: https://ai.eitcommunity.eu/factory-x
Further information to interested applicants	Additional Information: • **An info session is planned on December 9, 2026** to promote the call and advise interested startups, corporates or SMEs.

3. Description of the Factory X 2026-2027

3.1. Purpose and scope of activities

The Factory X is a flagship program of the EIT AI & Robotics Community, an initiative funded by the European Institute of Innovation & Technology (EIT). The program is led by 28DIGITAL with four EIT KICs actively participating in: 28DIGITAL, EIT Food, EIT Health, EIT Culture & Creativity.

The initiative aims to reinforce Europe's global positioning in frontier AI and robotics by mobilizing investments and fostering a connected pan-European ecosystem. It seeks to bridge the gap between innovation and market adoption by strengthening collaboration across industry, EU initiatives, research institutions, and innovators. In parallel, the effort will support market validation and scaling pathways for AI and robotics solutions, while advancing international outreach to strengthen Europe's global partnerships and visibility in the sector.

What is the FactoryX?

The FactoryX is the powerhouse to boost digital competencies in Europe and to translate frontier AI & robotics innovations into scalable solutions with tangible market and societal impact

The call will support multi-partner innovation projects that bridge research excellence, market needs, and commercialization pathways in AI and robotics. Proposals are expected to demonstrate strong collaboration across the European innovation ecosystem, including startups, AI Factories, EDIHs, SMEs, corporates, universities, and relevant EU-funded initiatives. Projects should demonstrate advanced maturity (TRL 6-8), clear market access pathways, and credible scale-up potential.

The Factory X 2026-2027 focuses on digital innovation in the following 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 simulation, and other enabling deep technologies with the potential to transform industries and create entirely new markets. **The following categories are representative of the main AI technology domains currently in scope:**

Technology	**Details**
Foundation Models & Generative AI	• Large Language Models (LLMs) • Small Language Models (SLMs) • Multimodal Foundation Models • Generative AI systems

	• Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG) • Domain-specific AI models • AI copilots and intelligent assistants
Autonomous AI & Agentic Systems	• AI agents • Multi-agent systems • Autonomous decision-making systems • Agentic AI • Planning and reasoning systems • Goal-driven autonomous workflows
Advanced Machine Learning	• Deep Learning • Reinforcement Learning • Self-supervised Learning • Transfer Learning • Federated Learning • Continual Learning • Online Learning systems
Trustworthy, Explainable & Secure AI	• Explainable AI (XAI) • Responsible AI • AI governance technologies • AI safety systems • AI Trust, Risk and Security Management (AI TRiSM) • Privacy-preserving AI • Secure and resilient AI systems
Knowledge-Based & Hybrid AI	• Knowledge Graphs • Neuro-symbolic AI • Causal AI • Reasoning engines • Semantic AI systems • Hybrid symbolic-machine learning approaches
Computer Vision & Perception	• Image and video understanding • Object detection and tracking • Scene understanding • Visual inspection systems • 3D perception • Spatial intelligence • Digital twins
Natural Language & Speech Technologies	• Natural Language Processing (NLP) • Speech recognition • Speech synthesis

	• Conversational AI • Multilingual AI • Semantic search • Information extraction
Robotics & Autonomous Systems	• Autonomous robots • Collaborative robots (cobots) • Mobile robotics • Industrial robotics • Service robotics • Humanoid robotics • Autonomous vehicles • Swarm robotics
Intelligent Robotic Control	• Robot learning • Reinforcement learning for robotics • Motion planning • Navigation systems • Adaptive control systems • Human-robot interaction • Human-in-the-loop AI
Edge AI & AI Infrastructure	• Edge AI • Embedded AI • AI accelerators • Neuromorphic computing • AI chips and processors • Distributed AI systems • AI model optimization and deployment
Robotics Simulation & Digital Engineering	• Simulation environments • Synthetic data generation • Robot digital twins • Virtual testing and validation • Sim-to-real transfer technologies

b) Strategic Tech

Strategic Technologies are frontier technologies aligned with the objectives of the **Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP)**[2][3], aimed at strengthening Europe's competitiveness, resilience, and technological sovereignty.

STEP focuses on four key sectors: digital technologies, clean technologies, biotechnology, and defence-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 defence and dual-use systems, trusted digital platforms, advanced industrial and mobility systems, and clean-tech or biotech applications powered by AI.

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

Thanks to the EIT Community support, projects will get access to our European ecosystem of innovators, corporates, Research and Transfer Organisations (RTOs), universities, SMEs, startups and scaleups, and you will receive resources, including financial support, to co-create your solution, further build your venture, package your technology, sign up customers and attract additional investors.

3.2. Background

The EIT AI & Robotics Community addresses a key European challenge: turning excellence in Artificial Intelligence and Robotics into market adoption, industrial competitiveness, and economic growth. Despite Europe's strong research base and supportive regulatory framework, challenges remain in scaling innovation, attracting investment, and accelerating the journey from research to market.

As enabling technologies with applications across all sectors, AI and Robotics require coordinated action across ecosystems, industries, and regions. The EIT AI & Robotics Community provides this pan-European response by bringing together innovators, researchers, industry, investors, and public stakeholders to accelerate the development, deployment, and scale-up of AI and robotics solutions.

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2 https://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

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

Through this collaborative approach, the Community strengthens entrepreneurship, facilitates access to markets and investment, promotes responsible innovation, and contributes to Europe's technological leadership, competitiveness, and strategic autonomy.

3.3. Main requirements for applicants

At the start of the activity, consortia are expected to demonstrate a high level of technological, market, and organizational maturity, consistent with at least **TRL 6–8.** This implies that the solution has been validated in a relevant or near-real operational environment and is already deployed or deployable with real customers. This enables rapid scaling and facilitating entry into international markets.

Applicants are invited to justify their current TRL and explain how the project will contribute to advancing the solution to the next maturity stage.

Ventures are expected to have **a validated product** that can already be used by customers and further improved during the implementation period of the project.

Applicants should have a clear understanding of the intellectual property related to their solution. This may include, but is not limited to:

- Ownership or access rights to the core technology or software
- Strong IP protection and ownership measures (e.g. copyrights, trade secrets, patents, or open-source strategies)
- A clear plan for managing IP as the venture develops

Formal IP registration is not required at the time of application, provided that applicants can demonstrate freedom to operate and a credible IP strategy.

We are looking for solution providers that already have **concrete initial customer engagement** (i.e. one paying initial customer at the start of the activity) or, at least, **committed customers** (e.g. customers willing to pay for pilots or tests in near-real environments). Proposals should emphasize close collaboration between startups and partners to deploy solutions on an industry scale, reduce risk, and strengthen market access. Clear plans for revenue generation should be a key objective.

A proposal should include the following components:

- **Problem / Solution**
    - A solution leveraging technology with the capacity to create or disrupt markets and a work plan that can achieve the stated objectives.
    - Evidence that each partner will contribute to the activity with valuable assets, including but not limited to IP, technology, freedom to operate.
    - Mandatory elevator pitch video (max. 90 seconds), presented by a member of the venture team, typically the Founder or CEO.

- Market impact/customer engagement
    - Market traction must be demonstrated through existing customer commitment, with one or more established or engaged customers in place at the start of the activity. The work plan should focus on co-creation with the industry partner(s), aiming to de-risk the solution and support its effective implementation in the market, alongside clear pathways toward revenue generation.
    - Customer engagement must be proven through invoices or sales evidence dated within the activity's timeframe.
    - A recommended approach is to engage additional customers as partners of the proposal to ensure their commitment to the outcome.
- Venture Team
    - The team responsible for the success of the venture must be clearly identified in the proposal.
    - Team members must present their roles in the venture, include a short CV, and evidence of their relevant expertise, as well as their long-term commitment to the venture.
- Resource and financial planning
    - A sound financial plan is required with a clear description of how all resources needed to execute the proposed activity will be financed.
    - Additional financial resources could be provided, for example, by:
        - Activity partners;
        - External private investors, such as angel investors, VCs, or Corporates;
        - The Founders' own financial resources.

3.4. Main requirements for project implementation

3.4.1. Project duration

All proposals must have an execution timeframe of nine months (April 2027 – December 2027).

3.4.2. Project implementation

Proposals must be submitted in line with a specific focus domain (see section 3.1.). Applicants should demonstrate a clear contribution to digital innovation within that domain.

Furthermore, proposals must demonstrate that the venture has:

- A capable team with the necessary technical and business expertise
- A realistic implementation plan and timeline for the nine-month period
- Clear milestones and measurable indicators of progress and success

By the end of the implementation phase, projects are expected to:

- Demonstrate regulation-ready solutions with validated pilots
- Show clear exploitation paths
- Focus on stronger industry adoption

During the nine-month period, eligible activities are limited to the following:

Product:

- Finalize and iteratively improve the solution for industry deployment
- Ensure technical stability, usability and compliance with relevant standards

Market:

- Adapt the product or service to meet market needs
- Engage with customers, partners, or pilot users in European and international markets
- Test value propositions, pricing models, and use cases
- Promote and sell the solution to new customers within the European and international market

Business Development:

- Develop a clear go-to-market strategy
- Establish the organizational, technical, and commercial basis for scaling the venture
- Identify potential growth pathways, partnerships, and follow-up funding opportunities

All proposals submitted to this call are required to comply with gender equality, diversity and inclusion principles in line with Annex 5 of the Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement, Specific Rules, Values) and the EIT Gender Equality Policy and Action Plan 2025-2027.

3.4.3. Deliverables

This table contains the mandatory deliverables. Since they provide a comprehensive view of the project performance and objectives achievement, it is not recommended to add additional ones to the proposal, although it would be possible if it is justified.

Deliverable	Description	KPI the deliverable contributes to
DEL01	Activity management report	General project performance
DEL02	Technical solution/MVP design document	ASQT type KPIs
DEL03	Report on business model, market research, product launch etc.	EITHE02.1 Market Innovation
DEL04	Communication and Dissemination Plan	EITHE02.1 Market Innovation
DEL05	Signed Share Transfer/ Revenue Sharing Agreement	28DIGITAL sustainability

3.4.4. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

All proposals must include a clear KPI plan describing how each KPI will be achieved, monitored, and reported. KPIs must be quantifiable and time bound.

The KPIs and minimum KPI targets in the table below are mandatory and must be included in the proposal. Proposals may include custom KPIs.

KPI Code	KPI description	Minimum target expected per proposal
EITHE03.1	Number of start-ups and scale-ups supported by the KIC for at least 2 months in year N, provided the KIC's services contribute to the company's growth (including potential growth). Examples of such services are mentoring, consultancy on access to finance and markets, product/service marketing, legal advice, internationalisation and matchmaking. The services should be provided for a total period of at least two months.	1
EITHE02.1	Innovation launched on the market	1
EITHE02.4	Innovations launched on the market (documented sales)	EUR 10,000
XKIC	EIT Community defined KPIs. The proposer can select some of them, whereas one of the following two is mandatory	To be selected by the proposer within a list of available internal KPIs on the submission platform
XKIC - IBC 12	# Involved paying clients (i.e. corporates)	4
EITHE06.1	Total amount of investment raised from public or private sources	EUR 4,000,000

As valuable KPI achievements may also materialise during subsequent years, partners will be asked to support the reporting of KPI results related to their Activity even after its end. The EIT AI & Robotics Community follows-up the selected activities up to 5 years after activity completion to track long-term impact and to ensure the achievement of KPIs after the activity ends.

3.4.5. Monitoring and reporting

All activities selected for funding undergo continuous monitoring to ensure effective progress and implementation and to trigger payments according to the achievement of milestones, deliverables and KPIs.

A **final report** covering financials, KPIs, deliverables, and overall activity results will be required upon activity completion for final assessment and payment.

In the case of under-performance, significant delay of implementation, misconduct of the consortium, or any other reason jeopardizing the timely implementation of the activity identified during the monitoring process, the EIT AI & Robotics Community and 28DIGITAL reserve the right to discontinue or restructure the funding of the activity at any point during its implementation.

Post-funding monitoring is required for up to five years after activity closure, possibly longer if required by the financial sustainability contribution agreements. Post-funding monitoring will be light in format and aims to capture the project's impact beyond the period of EIT funding.

3.4.6 Fast-Tracking conditions and requirements

Start-ups selected under this Call that demonstrate exceptional performance and high strategic value may be eligible for additional funding from the EIT AI & Robotics Community via the Fast Track mechanism. 28DIGITAL may, at its own discretion and subject to available budget, offer the opportunity of extra financial or non-financial support to start-ups/projects in its portfolio to maximize the impact of 28DIGITAL's portfolio and seize time-sensitive opportunities (i.e. EIT AI & Robotics Community Growth Studio, Founders Club, etc.). Successful execution and completion of a project will not guarantee Fast Track funding. Eligibility is strictly reserved for projects or entities that:

- Meet or Exceed Expectations: Have successfully achieved all planned milestones and be on track to deliver on its Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), if applicable.
- Justify Necessity: Can demonstrate a critical need for continued public funding to address specific market failures or regulatory hurdles.
- Strategic Alignment: Align with the specific strategic priorities of 28DIGITAL at the time of the Fast Track decision.

Evaluation process for the Fast Track mechanism

28DIGITAL will contact start-ups that could potentially qualify. To access additional support, existing start-ups in the portfolio will be required to present their case for additional support and submit a workplan and demonstrate the expected impact of the additional support requested.

Fast-tracked proposals will be subject to a specialized, expedited evaluation procedure involving an assessment by 28DIGITAL and independent external experts against standard Horizon Europe criteria (Excellence, Impact, Implementation) and financial sustainability contribution potential.

The new project proposal and budget would be considered and linked to the financial sustainability of the KIC with a renewed or fully new financial sustainability contribution agreement signed. This last step could lead to the need to perform an updated due diligence analysis and validation on those companies engaging in those Agreements.

4. Financial aspects of the call

4.1. KIC funding

The total budget allocated for the financing of proposals under this call is EUR 1,800,000. Each activity requests budget in the range from EUR 500,000 and EUR 900,000.

We reserve the right not to award all available funds and/or to redistribute them, subject to the proposals received and the results of the evaluation.

Funding condition: Any collaboration, award decision, or agreement resulting from this Call is strictly conditional upon 28DIGITAL receiving the corresponding funding from the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) under the applicable grant agreement.
In the event that such funding is not awarded, is reduced, suspended, or terminated, 28DIGITAL reserves the right, at its sole discretion and without liability, to withdraw the Call, cancel award decisions, terminate negotiations, amend the scope of activities, reduce funding amounts, or terminate or modify any resulting agreements to the extent required by the funding situation.
No applicant or partner shall be entitled to compensation, damages, or claims of any kind in connection with such withdrawal, modification, or termination resulting from the absence, reduction, suspension, or termination of EIT funding. Submission of a proposal or participation in this Call does not create any right to funding or to the conclusion of a collaboration agreement. If additional budget becomes available and the proposals meet the required quality standards, 28DIGITAL may fund additional proposals.

Scope of activities	Maximum indicative KIC funding	Indicative number of projects to be funded	Indicative max. annual EIT funding per project
Factory X 2026-2027	EUR 1,800,000	2	EUR 900,000

4.2. Co-funding rate

The consortium must contribute at least 30% of the total costs to the activity's budget through other resources (co-funding)[4].

Project's total costs = EIT funding + Co-funding

To be eligible, each partner must have an assigned budget; partners with a zero-budget allocation (from either EIT funding or own resources) cannot be included. Budgets may consist of EIT financial support, own co-funding, or a combination of both (preferred). All partners are requested to report their actual costs at the end of the activity, independently if they receive EIT financial support or not.

To assess the co-funding requirement, the project budget submitted must include the total project costs, not just a budget covering the EIT funding.

[4] The funds used for co-funding by the partners may come from several sources (partners' own resources, revenues, national grants, investors, etc.) However, it is not permitted to use other EU grants to support the co-funding.

It is **highly recommended** to design the Activity proposal with the **leanest and most cost-efficient approach**, using only the resources strictly needed to achieve the chosen objectives in the given timeframe.

4.3. Payment arrangements

The financial support offered by 28DIGITAL is structured in the form of **reimbursement of actual costs** declared in the activity proposal budget and will be disbursed in two instalments over the duration of the activity:

- Pre-financing payment:
  An initial pre-financing payment (60%) is made at the start of the activity, subject to the fulfilment of all contractual requirements. This payment is intended to support the implementation of the planned activities.
- Final payment:
  The balance of the funding (40%) is disbursed upon submission and approval of the final report. This payment is conditional upon the satisfactory completion of the activity, including the achievement of the agreed objectives, key performance indicators, and the quality of the submitted deliverables.

In cases where the implementation of the activity is incomplete, the agreed objectives or key performance indicators are not achieved, or the quality of deliverables is deemed insufficient, the final payment may be reduced accordingly.

4.4 Financial sustainability requirements

All awarded projects under this call must contribute to the long-term financial sustainability of the 28DIGITAL and its ecosystem. There are two options with different terms:

a) **Equity in the startup:** The equity offer needs to be justified and reflect the venture's current maturity and valuation. The guidance range is stated in the Annex for the Cut-off. If the offer does not meet the minimum equity percentage requirement it will be automatically rejected. Specifically, the venture must sign a Share Transfer Agreement (STA). A template of the STA can be found on the intranet and can be provided by 28DIGITAL staff upon request. Please make sure to read this document carefully before submission.

b) **Revenue Sharing Agreement:**
The consortium commits to sharing a portion of revenues generated from project results, namely the commercialisation of the funded innovation. Revenue sharing is triggered once sales revenues exceed EUR 10,000 and are generated within a maximum of five years after project end. The total amount of revenue sharing payment is set at the total project funding received plus a percentage mark-up agreed between the applicant and the Community. The percentage mark-up must be at least 15%.

The final details of the selected financial sustainability option will be negotiated and confirmed by both parties prior to the signature of the agreement.

4.5 Cost eligibility

The financial justification of the activity is detailed in the 28DIGITAL submission system (tab "5. Tasks and Costs", tab "6. Cost justification" and in tab "7. Funding"). The budget information needs to be precise and concrete, considering the requirements from the Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement (MGA) and the 28DIGITAL Financial Support Agreement (FSA). These are key documents defining the general framework under which Activities need to operate. These are shared with 28DIGITAL Partners via the 28DIGITAL intranet page. It is highly recommended for activity partners that are not 28DIGITAL Partners yet, to get in contact with 28DIGITAL staff early on to gain access to the intranet, where the Model Grant Agreement (MGA) document, as well as the submission system, can be found.

It is very important that the activity proposal assigns its budget to the correct cost categories, amongst the following:

A. Personnel costs
B. Sub-contracting costs
C. Purchase costs
D. Other cost categories
E. Indirect costs. This is a flat rate of 25% calculated on the eligible direct costs (categories A-D, except volunteer's costs, subcontracting costs, financial support to third parties and exempted specific cost categories, if any).

Please note the following about the content in the Model Grant Agreement and 28DIGITAL submission system:

- The "action" refers to the 28DIGITAL Business Plan including its Annexes.
- Costs need to be allocated to one or more tasks. Tasks define how the work is broken down between partners and how much each part of the work costs. It is possible to model the budget of a Task based on planning assumptions, while the reporting will have to be based on actual costs, which cannot exceed the approved budget.
- Financial Support to Third Parties (or sub-granting) by participants in the proposal is not allowed in this Call.
- Sub-contracting needs to be explicitly defined in the proposal that will be included in the Business Plan and follow all applicable rules, especially regarding the value for money and avoidance of conflict of interest.
- Full Time Equivalents (FTE): We strongly recommend a commitment of at least 2 FTEs per partner and Task Leader/Contributor to ensure a meaningful involvement and the allocation of enough capacity to the specific task.

5. Call criteria

Following the deadline for submission, the admissibility, eligibility, exclusion and selection criteria checks will be performed for each proposal in line with the following criteria.

How to apply:

1. Register in the EU Funding & Tender Portal and obtain a valid PIC number. If an organisation has already a PIC number, there is no need to register again.
2. Register in the 28DIGITAL Platform, by submitting the Partner Information Form (PIF).
3. Once you have your credentials, you can enter the 28DIGITAL platform after setting a new password.
4. Find the call for the currently open cut-off date under menu → Call for Proposals →Open Calls.
5. Submit your application within the given deadline.

5.1. Admissibility

Applications:

- must be submitted before the call deadline for each of the Cut-off dates (see Annex 1).
- must be submitted using the forms provided inside the electronic submission system
- must be complete and contain all parts and mandatory annexes and supporting documents. The structure and presentation must correspond to the instructions given in the forms.
- must be readable, accessible and printable.
- must respect the page limit applicable to the call. If an application exceeds the limits, excess pages will not be taken into consideration by the evaluators.
- contain a short pitch video (max. 90 seconds).
- are written in English.
- include a valid Participant Identification Code (PIC) for the applicant organisation at the time of submission.

Any proposals submitted after the deadline will be inadmissible. **Pay attention that submitting in the last hours before the deadline can face technical problems due to system saturation or other cases.** No claims will be accepted due to last moment submission failure.

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

5.2 Eligibility

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

5.2.1 Entities eligible to participate

Any legal entity, regardless of its place of establishment, including legal entities from non-associated third countries is **eligible to participate**, provided that the conditions laid down in the Horizon Europe Regulation have been met (e.g. the entity is not under EU sanction), along with any other conditions laid down in the specific call/topic.

For this call, a 'legal entity' means legal person created and recognised as such under national law, EU law or international law, which has legal personality and which may, acting in its own name, exercise rights and be subject to obligations, or an entity without legal personality.

5.2.2 Eligibility for funding

In accordance with the Horizon Europe Work Program 2025[5], in order to be **eligible for funding**, the **applicant must be established in one of the eligible countries**, i.e.:

- the Member States of the European Union, including their outermost regions;
- the Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) linked to the Member States[6];
- countries associated to Horizon Europe[7];
- certain low- and middle-income countries[8].

Legal entities, which are established in countries not listed above will be eligible for funding if their participation is considered essential for implementing the action by the EIT.

Affiliated entities — Affiliated entities are eligible for funding if they are established in one of the countries listed above, or in a country identified in the call.

Associated partners — Entities not eligible for funding (and therefore not able to participate as beneficiaries) may participate as associated partners.

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

[6] 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 Program Guide on the portal for a complete list of OCTs.

[7] Please see the Horizon Europe Program Guide on the Funding and Tenders Portal for up-to-date information on the current list of and the position for Associated Countries: https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/program-guide_horizon_en.pdf

[8] See the Horizon Europe Program Guide on the Funding and Tenders Portal for a complete list of these countries. List of participating countries in Horizon Europe.

5.2.3 Call specific eligibility criteria

Eligibility conditions
The venture has been incorporated max. 5 years before the submission date.
Proposals must include a minimum of two partners, from two different eligible countries (EU member States or HE Associated Countries).
Every partner contributes to budget allocation via EIT funding and/or partner's own contribution (co-funding) and should not fall under the same ownership.
The proposal requests funding as stated in the cut-off specific Annex.
The equity proposal from the venture is in the cut-off specific range (see Annex for further details).
The venture has outright ownership of a substantial majority of the product's IP to which the proposal applies.
The venture is not a subsidiary of another company and is not controlled by another company other than, if applicable, a non-trading holding company established solely for the assignment of founder shares.
The Technology Readiness Level of the proposed solution is between 6-8.
The venture has a minimum of 2 FTEs.
At least one corporate partner must be involved in the consortium.
At least one AI Factory[9] well established must be involved in the consortium.

5.2.4 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)[10]

[9] https://www.eurohpc-ju.europa.eu/ai-factories_en

[10] 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

as well as Article 75 TFEU[11], 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[12].

- **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 program 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 addressed to Russia, following the adoption of the Council Regulation (EU) 2024/1745 of 24 June 2024[13] (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.

- **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[14]. For further information, please refer to the Horizon Europe, Work Program 2025, General Annexes, B – Eligibility on page 14[15].

Only proposals satisfying all the eligibility criteria mentioned above shall pass on to the selection and evaluation stages.

5.2.5 Consortium composition

Only legal entities forming a consortium are eligible to participate in the actions, provided that the consortium includes, as beneficiaries, at least two legal entities independent from each other and each established in a different country, as follows:

[11] 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

[12] 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)

[13] OJ L 229, 31.7.2014, p. 1–11

[14] 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.

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

- A consortium comprising 2-4 complementary organizations independent from each other, and legally established in a different country.
- Consortia must be covering at least two sides of the Knowledge Triangle (Education, Innovation, Business Creation).
- The consortium must include a venture that will be the partner providing equity for the financial sustainability of 28DIGITAL.
- The complementary partners are requested to add value to the venture.
- The consortium must include at least one corporate.
- The consortium must include at least one organisation from an AI Factory[16]
- Other than the venture, the other participating partners are not required to provide equity.
- Cross-border collaboration with Horizon Europe associated international partners (i.e. Canada, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, and Tunisia) is strongly encouraged.

As affiliated entities do not sign the Financial Support Agreement, they do not count towards the minimum eligibility criteria for consortium composition (if any).

Note: Participation from RIS countries is encouraged and positively evaluated. Participation of gender balanced teams is encouraged and positively evaluated.

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. Applicants that are subject to EU administrative sanctions (i.e. exclusion) or are in one of the following exclusion situations that bar them from receiving EU grants can NOT participate:

- 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);
- they are in breach of social security or tax obligations (including if done by persons with unlimited liability for the applicant's debts);
- they are guilty of grave professional misconduct (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);
- they are 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);

[16] https://www.eurohpc-ju.europa.eu/ai-factories_en

- they have 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);
- they are guilty of irregularities within the meaning of Article 1(2) of Regulation No 2988/9534 (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); or
- they have 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).
- have misrepresented the information required as a condition for participating in the procedure or have failed to supply that information; or
- were previously involved in the preparation of documents used in the award procedure where this entails a breach of the principle of equality of treatment, including distortion of competition, that cannot be remedied otherwise.

As evidence, the applicants (i.e. the coordinator and all the proposed partners participating in the applicant consortium) will have to submit a **declaration of honour on exclusion criteria and absence of conflict of interest**. Failure to provide adequate documentation may result in the exclusion of the applicants concerned.

5.4 Selection criteria

5.4.1 Financial capacity criteria

By submitting the proposals, the applicants confirm that they have stable and sufficient financial resources to successfully implement the proposals in which they participate.

If an applicant is participating in several projects, it must have sufficient financial capacity to implement them in parallel.

In case of doubt, further information may be required, and risk mitigation measure(s) may be applied by the KIC.

5.4.2 Operational capacity criteria

Applicants must have the experience, the know-how, qualifications and resources to successfully implement their tasks in the project and contribute their share.

By submitting the proposals, the applicants confirm that they have the experience, know-how, qualifications and operational resources (human, technical and other) to successfully implement the proposals.

If an applicant is participating in several projects, it must have sufficient operational capacity to implement them in parallel.

Additional documents may be requested by the KIC to confirm the operational capacity of the applicants.

5.5 Award criteria

5.5.1 Award criteria, sub-criteria and maximum scores

This call follows Horizon Europe criteria and therefore the following Criteria are applied:

a) Excellence: Clarity and pertinence of the project's objectives, and the extent to which the proposed work is ambitious, and goes beyond the state-of-the-art. Soundness of the proposed methodology, including the underlying concepts, models, assumptions, interdisciplinary approaches, appropriate consideration of the gender dimension in research and innovation content, and the quality of open science practices including sharing and management of research outputs and engagement of citizens, civil society and end users where appropriate.

b) Impact: Credibility of the pathways to achieve the expected outcomes and impacts specified in the work program, and the likely scale and significance of the contributions due to the project. Suitability and quality of the measures to maximize expected outcomes and impacts, as set out in the dissemination and exploitation plan, including communication activities.

c) 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 extent to which the venture brings the necessary expertise.

In addition, the following criteria will also be reviewed during the MC evaluation gate:

(d) KIC portfolio strategic fit and compliance with the financial sustainability principles and knowledge triangle integration

Table 1: Award Criteria for Review Gate (only for proposals that successfully passed the Eligibility Gate)

(a) Excellence	Maximum score 20
Is the venture building a novel Core AI / Robotics solution with clear advancement beyond the state of the art?	5
Is the venture aligned with one or more Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP)?	5
Is the timing optimal considering market pull, industrial readiness, and technological maturity?	5
To what extent does the proposal address gender mainstreaming and integrate a gender dimension throughout its design, implementation and expected outcomes?	5

(b) Impact	Maximum score 15
How does the venture position itself in the competitive landscape? How realistic and sound are the assumptions and estimations?	5
Is there validated market demand (e.g. pilots, paying customers, LOIs, procurement signals)?	5
How strong is the venture's investment readiness and capital attraction potential? Is there additional financial investment committed to the venture? Are the financial projections, unit economics, and funding needs realistic, ambitious, and investor-grade?	5

(c) Quality and efficiency of the implementation	Maximum score 15
How strong is the work plan?	5
Is the founder/s' and CxO's track record convincing? Are their seniority level, experience, and background appropriate for the venture's goals?	5
Is the partner setup complementary and well positioned to add value to the venture?	5

Proposals that score at least 35 / 50 across all dimensions will move to the next stage. Applicants must achieve a minimum score of 3 out of 5 in each assessment dimension.

Table 2: Award Criteria for MC Gate (only for proposals that successfully passed the Review Gate)

d) Strategic fit KIC Portfolio strategic fit and compliance with the financial sustainability principles and knowledge triangle integration	Maximum score 25
Does the project have the potential to provide value to EIT Community & 28DIGITAL's long-term financial sustainability?	5
Is the proposed equity transfer suitably aligned with the current maturity of the venture and is it strategic for the Equity Portfolio?	5
Does the venture have adequate traction?	5
Is the proposal aligned with the Knowledge Triangle Integration concept?	5
Is the proposal strategic for the EIT AI & Robotics Community & 28DIGITAL ecosystem?	5

Proposals that score at least 18 / 25 across all dimensions will move to the next stage. Applicants must achieve a minimum score of 3 out of 5 in each assessment dimension.

5.5.2 Relative weight of the award criteria

Criterion	Maximum Score	Relative weight
a) Excellence	20	Weight: 25%
b) Impact	15	Weight: 25%
c) Quality, efficiency and implementation	15	Weight: 25%
d) Strategic fit	25	Weight: 25%
Total points	**75**	**100%**

6. Evaluation procedure

6.1 Admissibility and eligibility, exclusion and selection stages

This call is managed by 28DIGITAL. Both 28DIGITAL Partner and non-Partner organizations are encouraged to apply. However, the organizations that are not yet a Partner are expected to initiate their application to join the partnership before the submission of the proposal. If the proposal is selected, the application must then be completed before the start of the activity.

It is highly recommended for activity partners that are not 28DIGITAL Partners yet, to get in contact with 28DIGITAL staff early on to ensure a clear understanding of the partnership requirements, as well as to gain access to the intranet, where the submission system can be found. More information including details on how to become a partner are available at: https://28DIGITAL.eu/our-community/become-a-partner/

6.2 Evaluation of proposals

Each activity proposal must go through the following selection steps to be considered for support as part of the Factory X 2026-2027.

First, it must go through an **Eligibility Criteria Check**, followed by the Evaluation Gates: the **Review Gate** and the **Management Committee (MC) Gate**. Activity proposals that pass the Eligibility Criteria Check and the Evaluation Gates will be called for **Due Diligence Interviews** with the MC, after which a **Final Consensus Meeting** is held by the MC during which a final ranking is established.

Only activity proposals that pass the previous gate will be assessed at the following gate. Scoring details for each Evaluation Gate are defined in section 5.5 of this document.

The five selection steps consist of, in order:

1. **Eligibility Criteria Check:** 28DIGITAL experts review the submitted proposals and assess their alignment with the eligibility criteria defined in section 5.2 of this document.
2. **Review Gate:** Each proposal is assessed against the standard Horizon Europe evaluation criteria by **at least three independent external experts with complementary profiles:**

- Technical expert (academic/research or equivalent)
- Commercial expert (VC / experienced operator)
- Industry deployer (deployment/integration leader)

An internal non-scoring panel member ensures procedural compliance, while an EIT/EU observer may participate in a non-scoring capacity where applicable. Individual Evaluation Reports (IERs) are consolidated into a consensus Summary Evaluation Report (SER), providing final scores, strengths, risks, and conditions.

Each expert evaluates the proposals following the evaluation criteria outlined in Table 1: Award Criteria for Review Gate. During the Review Gate Consensus Meeting, the experts come together to discuss each proposal based on their own individual assessments and assign in consensus a Review Gate Score. If the proposal attains the Review Gate minimum required score (at least 35 / 50), then it will advance to the MC Gate. The Review Gate scores remain unchanged in the following evaluation steps and cannot be modified at the MC Gate, Due Diligence interviews or during the Final Consensus Meeting.

3. MC Gate: The Management Committee of 28DIGITAL (comprising the C-Suite and Regional Node Directors) assigns a MC Gate Score based on the evaluation criteria outlined in "Table 2: Award Criteria for MC Gate" (page 29) including financial sustainability objectives and strategic alignment goals. To issue the final ranking the proposal needs to pass the MC Gate minimum required threshold (at least 18 / 25)). An internal non-scoring panel member ensures procedural compliance, while an EIT/EU observer may participate in a non-scoring capacity where applicable. All members of the Management Committee (MC) are subject to the applicable Conflict of Interest (see Intranet) provisions and must declare any actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest in accordance with the call's conflict of interest policy.
   Due Diligence Interviews: Due Diligence Interviews are scheduled shortly after the MC Gate takes place and a timeline is provided in the Cut-off specific document. The founders of the invited venture are expected to attend and present. During these interviews, the teams will be challenged on the information provided in their submission and any concerns which emerge during the previous Gates. The quality of the pitch and the responses provided by the teams will be assessed against the Strategic Fit criteria, as outlined in Table 2 of Section 5.5.1.

Based on the answers provided by the venture, the criteria scored in the MC Gate (only criteria d) Strategic Fit) may be amended.

The interviews will last 45 minutes, distributed in 5 min for introductions, 5 min pitch deck presentation and maximum 35 min Q&A by the Management Committee of 28DIGITAL. The pitch deck must be no more than 10 slides in length, and it must be presented by the CEO or founder of the venture. Both pitch deck and presentation must be in English. Applicants are expected to ensure their availability for the Due Diligence interviews and to accept the interview date and time assigned if invited. 28DIGITAL will not be able to rearrange interview slots according to the availability of applicants.

4. **Final Consensus Meeting:** The MC convenes in a final Consensus Meeting to determine the final ranking (combined weighted scores consisting of Review Gate and MC Gate). The highest scoring proposals that have passed the relevant thresholds will be selected as winners of the Factory X 2026-2027 program and will be funded subject to the available budget for that cut-off.

6.2.1 Assessment methodology

For each of the respective evaluation stages, evaluations will be based on the following criteria on a scale from 0 to 5.

0 – Proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to mission 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.

To proceed to the next stage proposals must achieve:

- A minimum score of 3 out of 5 in each assessment dimension.
- In the Review Gate: an **overall minimum score of 35 out of 50**
- In the MC Gate: an **overall minimum score of 18 out 25**
- In the Final Consensus Meeting: proposals will be considered eligible for funding only if they achieve a **minimum overall score of 53 out of 75 (combined weighted score).** Among the proposals that meet this threshold, funding will be awarded in order of ranking, starting from the highest-scoring proposal, until the budget available for that cut-off is exhausted

In the event of a tie, ranking priority will be determined according to the following order:

1. Higher average score for the **Impact criteria**;

2. Higher average score for the **Excellence criteria**;

3. Lead partner is based in a RIS country

If proposals remain tied after applying the criteria above, the **Management Committee of 28DIGITAL** will determine the final ranking at its discretion.

6.2.2 Results of the evaluation: award, reserve list

28DIGITAL reserves the right to establish a reserve list for those proposals passing all thresholds that due to budget constraints cannot be funded. The duration of the reserve list is 75 days from the start of the Activity Execution. The validity of the reserve list may be extended by decision of the 28DIGITAL's Management Committee.

If for any reasons the selected partners do not sign the Financial Support Agreement within 60 days after the start of the Activity Execution, 28DIGITAL may select the next proposal on the reserve list ranking without launching an additional call. In the event of a finally unused budget (e.g. where an accepted proposal is unable to complete the project), funding may be allocated to a proposal on the reserve list, subject to the reserve list remaining valid at the time of allocation or, where applicable, to an explicit decision by the 28DIGITAL Management Committee to extend its validity.

Candidates should note that their inclusion on the reserve list does not imply any entitlement to participate in the Factory X 2026-2027 program.

6.3 Communication of evaluation results to applicants

6.3.1 Communication of evaluation results

Following the award decision, all applicants will be informed of the result in writing by email within 5 working days after the final decision to the Activity Leader who is responsible to share with all other participants. All applicants will receive their assessment, including their score.

In case an applicant requests further clarification regarding the evaluation result, it may contact the KIC by email. Such requests will be replied within 15 days (this deadline may be extended by the KIC with due justification).

Successful proposals will be invited to the financial support agreement preparation stage/onboarding, the other proposals will be put on the reserve list or rejected.

6.3.2 Requirements for selected proposals

If the proposal is selected, the communication on the evaluation results may include a set of recommendations/conditions as a result of the outcome of the evaluation. These requirements may not entail a substantial modification of the proposal.

The communication will establish a clear and non-negotiable deadline for the submission of the adjusted proposals.

Should all conditions be met within the established deadline, 28DIGITAL will initiate the financial support agreement preparation process/onboarding (e.g. legal entity validation, signature of Declaration of honour, if not yet provided, financial capacity check, if relevant).

If the applicant fails to comply with the provided recommendations/conditions or does not respond in the time allocated, the 28DIGITAL reserves the right to withdraw the conditional notification. Should this occur, the next proposal will be contacted following the ranking list.

6.4 Publication of recipients of funds annually

The KIC shall make available (on a dedicated page on its website) information on recipients of funds (only legal persons or entities without a legal personality) financed from the EIT 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, having due regard for the requirements of confidentiality and security, in particular the protection of personal data:

(a) the recipient's full legal name and the country where it is established;

(b) the amount committed and, in case of a commitment with multiple recipients, the breakdown of this amount per recipient where available;

(c) subject of grant or contract.

6.5 Appeal process

28DIGITAL will address, in good faith and in a timely manner, any appeal relating to the outcome of the selection process described in this document.

Appeals shall be addressed to the attention of the Factory X 2026-2027 Team, by factually underpinning the alleged errors in the selection process followed by 28DIGITAL within 5 business days date of publication of the results. The 28DIGITAL Team will examine the appeal and, if possible grounds for appeal are found, then the appeal will be sent for a consideration by the Management Committee. The 28DIGITAL Management Committee will review the appeal and make a final decision.
The grounds for appeal are:

- Process errors
- Technical problems beyond the control of applicants (not related with submission in the last minute)
- Obvious human/mechanical errors made by 28DIGITAL staff.

Please note: External Experts provide independent assessment, and their scoring and feedback cannot be re-evaluated in the appealing process by 28DIGITAL. Therefore, disagreement with the scores or comments of the evaluators does not constitute admissible grounds for a request for review.

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 Factory X 2026-2027. In addition, registered applicants will be informed via email of any amendments to the call.

28DIGITAL may declare the call unsuccessful in case no applications are received, if the applications do not meet the admissibility, eligibility, exclusion and selection criteria, or if none of the applications reach the thresholds laid down in this call text.

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 Financial Support 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 that 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 anytime before the signature of the Financial Support 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. 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 Factory X 2026-2027 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 (e.g. KIC Co-Location Centres) 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 the 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;

- 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

Dissemination plan including communications and outreach is required for each activity in line with HE Guidance (Art.17 of the MGA). Unless otherwise agreed, the partners of the selected Activities must promote the activity and its results by providing targeted information to multiple audiences (including the media and the public).

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, 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 the EIT **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 Activity must use factually accurate information.

The following statement must be displayed:

"This activity is supported by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT), a body of the European Union."

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 EIT. Neither the European Union nor EIT can be held responsible for them."

If a beneficiary breaches any of its obligations under this Article, the financial support 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[17], the EU Financial Regulation[18], the Horizon Europe Regulation[19]), 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 Financial Support Agreement between successful applicants and 28DIGITAL, available at the Intranet Factory X 2026-2027 page.

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.

[17] Regulation (EU) 2021/819
[18] Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/2509
[19] Regulation (EU) 2021/695

Annex 1 – Specific conditions for Cut-Off 1

Timeline:

Action	Date
Submission system opens	November 23, 2026
Info session	Info Session: December 9, 2026
Cut-off 1 closing	January 18, 2027, 17:00 CET
Communication to non-eligible activities	January 20, 2027
Invitation of pre-selected activities to Due Diligence interviews & Communication to non-selected activities in the previous gates	February 12, 2027
Due Diligence interviews (mandatory for the selected proposals)	February 18 & 19, 2027
Feedback to selected/rejected activities	February 26, 2027
Standstill period	March 2027
Activities start	April 1, 2027

Topics

The Factory X 2026-2027 focuses on digital innovation in the following domains:

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

c) Strategic Tech

Strategic Technologies are frontier technologies aligned with the objectives of the **Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP)**[2021], aimed at strengthening Europe's competitiveness, resilience, and technological sovereignty.

STEP focuses on four key sectors: **digital technologies, clean technologies, biotechnology, and defence-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 defence and dual-use systems, trusted digital platforms, advanced industrial and mobility systems, and clean-tech or biotech applications powered by AI.

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

The following categories are representative of the main AI technology domains currently in scope:

Technology	Details
Foundation Models & Generative AI	Large Language Models (LLMs) Small Language Models (SLMs) Multimodal Foundation Models Generative AI systems Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG) Domain-specific AI models AI copilots and intelligent assistants
Autonomous AI & Agentic Systems	AI agents Multi-agent systems Autonomous decision-making systems Agentic AI Planning and reasoning systems Goal-driven autonomous workflows
Advanced Machine Learning	Deep Learning Reinforcement Learning Self-supervised Learning Transfer Learning Federated Learning

20 https://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

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

	Continual Learning Online Learning systems
Trustworthy, Explainable & Secure AI	Explainable AI (XAI) Responsible AI AI governance technologies AI safety systems AI Trust, Risk and Security Management (AI TRiSM) Privacy-preserving AI Secure and resilient AI systems
Knowledge-Based & Hybrid AI	Knowledge Graphs Neuro-symbolic AI Causal AI Reasoning engines Semantic AI systems Hybrid symbolic-machine learning approaches
Computer Vision & Perception	Image and video understanding Object detection and tracking Scene understanding Visual inspection systems 3D perception Spatial intelligence Digital twins
Natural Language & Speech Technologies	Natural Language Processing (NLP) Speech recognition Speech synthesis Conversational AI Multilingual AI Semantic search Information extraction
Robotics & Autonomous Systems	Autonomous robots Collaborative robots (cobots) Mobile robotics Industrial robotics Service robotics Humanoid robotics Autonomous vehicles Swarm robotics
Intelligent Robotic Control	Robot learning Reinforcement learning for robotics Motion planning Navigation systems Adaptive control systems Human-robot interaction Human-in-the-loop AI
Edge AI & AI Infrastructure	Edge AI Embedded AI

	AI accelerators Neuromorphic computing AI chips and processors Distributed AI systems AI model optimization and deployment
Robotics Simulation & Digital Engineering	Simulation environments Synthetic data generation Robot digital twins Virtual testing and validation Sim-to-real transfer technologies

Conditions

Eligibility conditions
The venture has been incorporated max. 5 years before the submission date.
Proposals must include a minimum of two partners, from two different eligible countries (EU member States or Horizon Europe Associated Countries).
Every partner contributes to budget allocation via EIT funding and/or partner's own contribution (co-funding) and should not fall under the same ownership.
The proposal must request funding in the range from EUR 500,000 to 900,000.
The equity proposal from the venture to be boosted is in the range of 3.5-10%
The venture has outright ownership of a substantial majority of the product's IP to which the proposal applies.
The venture is not a subsidiary of another company and is not controlled by another company other than, if applicable, a non-trading holding company established solely for the assignment of founder shares.
The Technology Readiness Level of the proposed solution is between 6-8.
The venture has a minimum of 2 FTEs.
At least one corporate partner must be involved in the consortium.

Eligibility conditions
At least one AI Factory[22] must be involved in the consortium.

[22] https://www.eurohpc-ju.europa.eu/ai-factories_en