



## AID4SME | Open Call #2

### **Annex 1. Guidelines for Applicants**

**Version 1.1 – 2026.06.15**

#### **Disclaimer**

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**Document history**

Version	Publication Date	Change
1.0	2026.05.13	First version
1.1	2026.06.15	<p>Section 4.1.3 Eligible countries:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Remove the United Kingdom reference in <i>“Note that at the time of signing the AID4SME GA (November 2024), the United Kingdom and Switzerland had not yet signed an association agreement producing legal effects.”</i></li></ul>

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## 1. What is AID4SME?

AID4SME is a European Project under the Horizon Europe Programme (HORIZON-CL4-2024-DIGITALEMERGING-01) – Grant Agreement no. 101189562. The 36-month project kicked-off in December 2024 and counts 16 partners from multiple sectors and European countries.

AID4SME aims to facilitate Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in developing combined Artificial Intelligence (AI) and data solutions for large scale resource optimisation challenges for industries that have significant impact on the objectives of the Green Deal.

A minimum 20 SMEs, selected through 2 open calls, will receive FSTP to develop these solutions with the support of a Community of Practice (COP). The ambition is to create a COP that will continue after the project lifetime. AID4SME brings together 9 technology blocks and low-TRL (technology readiness level) playgrounds from 4 scientific partners, to educate and support the SMEs. Additionally, 4 large industry partners (from automotive, whitegoods, battery and energy sector) provide real-life large scale resource optimization challenges that require combined AI and data solutions, and high-TRL playgrounds to integrate and demonstrate the solutions. AID4SME offers an open platform that is flexible to bring in challenges from outside the consortium. AID4SME provides the infrastructure and learning environment that enable the SMEs to solve the challenges, demonstrate solutions and grow into impactful enterprises. The technology blocks cover a wide area of AI and data technologies for the full cycle of data collection, creation of insights, decision support and automation. These technologies have the potential to have a significant impact on the Green Transition and boost EU competitiveness for industries. AID4SME will collaborate with the AI-on-Demand platform to enrich its repository with the AID4SME tools and framework, while it is open to deploy the tools/frameworks already available on the AI-on-Demand platform for new use cases. AID4SME will assess the impact of the developed technologies on Green Deal objectives and on social and human aspects. AID4SME brings along partners who are experienced in re-skilling and up-skilling of SMEs and applying standardization as an enabler for exploitation. The wide geographical coverage, with partners and Digital Innovation Hubs (DIHs) from across Europe, ensures maximum impact.

This document is specifically designed for Open Call #2.

## 2. What is the AID4SME - Open Call #2 offer?

The *Open Call* is the competitive process by which eligible applicants apply to have access to the AID4SME programme.

Applications to the Open Call will be accepted from **15 May 2026 until 15 July 2026 (17:00 Brussels time)**. After the selection is completed, selected applicants will be invited to sign the sub-grant agreement and enter the AID4SME Programme #2.

**The AID4SME Programme #2 is organised in 4 stages of 14 months.** Stage 1 - Plan from 01 November 2026 to 31 November 2026, Stage 2 - Development from 01 December 2026 to 30 June 2027, Stage 3 - Test from 01 July 2027 to 31 August 2027, and Stage 4 - Assessment from 01 September 2027 to 31 December 2027.

During these phases, beneficiaries will have the support of a mentor to monitor project progress and facilitate communication with technical partners.

**The programme will select up to 12 applications**, each addressing one of the challenges/topics defined in [section 3](#), providing a maximum contribution of EUR 200 000.00, to be paid in form of lump sums at the end of periods 1, 2 and 3 (30% + 40% + 30%) ([section 7.2](#)).

**The indicative budget for AID4SME - Open Call #2 is EUR 2 350 000.00.**

### Relevant links and contacts

- Project website: <https://aid4sme.eu/>
- Open call application form: <https://www.f6s.com/aid4sme-oc-2>
- Contact us: [aid4sme\\_ocs\\_helpdesk@f6s.com](mailto:aid4sme_ocs_helpdesk@f6s.com)

### 3. Challenges of the AID4SME - Open Call #2

The AID4SME - Open Call #2 invites potential applicants ([section 4.1.1](#)) to submit proposals that addresses 1 of the 10 challenges within the following 4 domains (Table 1):

- Domain 1: Combined AI and Data solutions for Data Collection
- Domain 2: Combined AI and Data solutions for creation of Insights
- Domain 3: Combined AI and Data solutions for Decision Support
- Domain 4: Combined AI and Data solutions for Automation

Table 1. AID4SME - Open Call #2 domains and challenges

Domain	Code	Challenges
Combined AI and Data solutions for Data Collection	C1.1	Augmented sensing solution
Combined AI and Data solutions for creation of Insights	C2.1	Product-production Digital Twins
	C2.2	Automated monitoring hygiene inspection for refurbishment
	C2.3	Energy system Digital Twin decision support tool
Combined AI and Data solutions for Decision Support	C3.2	Automated machine selection for parts production
	C3.3	Battery production digitalwork instructions & skill capturing
	C3.4	Automated warehouse and internal logistics management
Combined AI and Data solutions for Automation	C4.1	Smart energy management of unplanned machine downtime
	C4.3	Semi-automated EV battery disassembly for recycling
	C4.4	Co-bot refrigerator door assembly solutions

For each specific challenge, proposed solutions must target a set of defined Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) from resource optimization to social impact.

A full description of AID4SME - Open Call #2's challenges is available at **Annex 1.1 Challenge description** (<https://aid4sme.eu/open-call-2/>).

## 4. Who can apply and how?

### 4.1. Types of applicants

The AID4SME - Open Call #2 is looking for Technology Developers to develop, test and validate Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Data solutions in the framework of the AID4SME project.

#### 4.1.1. Eligible applicants

Eligible applicants for the AID4SME - Open Call #2 are:

- **Start-ups, and Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)** working on related technologies.

*Relevant notes:*

- Please consult the [EU SME Definition](#) for details on what constitutes an SME.
- A signed version of the Declaration of Honour and the SME Declaration (when applicable) will be requested during the contract preparation phase.

#### 4.1.2. Consortium requirements

The AID4SME - Open Call #2 is accepting applications from single or consortia of up to 2 eligible applicants led by a SME and/ or Start-up ([section 4.1.1](#)).

The following entities may also participate as a consortium member without requesting financial support:

- **Industry organisations** providing the SMEs / Start-ups use-cases and high-TRL playgrounds for solution testing and validation;
- **Integrators/ engineering services** that support the SMEs / Start-ups in integration of the solutions;
- **Research institutions, research infrastructures, non-profit organisations and charitable (scientific) foundations and public research centres.**

The AID4SME is mandated to only provide financial support to SMEs and start-ups ([section 4.1.1](#)), meaning that only these entities can apply for funding within the AID4SME - Open Call #2.

#### 4.1.3. Eligible countries

Eligible countries that may receive funding through this Open Call are legal entities from:

- European Union Member States with a valid VAT.
- Horizon Europe associated countries (those that have signed an agreement producing legal effects with the European Union (EU) as identified in the Horizon Europe Programme Guide) according to the updated list published by the European Commission (EC). For the AID4SME project, the reference version at the time of the signature of the Grant Agreement (GA) is **v3.1 (11-07-2024)**<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>

[https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/guidance/list-3rd-country-participation\\_horizon-euratom\\_v3.1\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/guidance/list-3rd-country-participation_horizon-euratom_v3.1_en.pdf)

Note that at the time of signing the AID4SME GA (November 2024), Switzerland had not yet signed an association agreement producing legal effects.

The AID4SME - Open Call #2 follows the rules applied by the EC for the R&D Programme Horizon Europe in terms of geographical coverage, eligibility, and exclusions, which take precedence.

#### 4.1.4. Multiple submissions

The AID4SME - Open Call #2 will accept a **maximum of 1 application** per eligible applicants ([section 4.1.1](#)) and consortium entities ([section 4.1.2](#)). The limit applies whether the entity applies alone or in a consortium. Research institutions, research infrastructures, non-profit organisations and charitable (scientific) foundations and public research centres are not limited by the maximum number of applications.

In case an entity submits more than **1** application, **only the application submitted last will be eligible**. This also applies to entities that have submitted more than 1 application, however, addressing different challenges ([section 3](#)).

#### 4.2. Types of projects

The AID4SME - Open Call #2 aims to fund innovative projects that address the challenges identified in [section 3](#). Applicants are required to select one of the challenges presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Challenges of the AID4SME - Open Call #2

Code	Title	Proposals to be selected
C1.1	Augmented sensing solution	Up to 2
C2.1	Product-production Digital Twins	
C2.2	Automated monitoring hygiene inspection for refurbishment	
C2.3	Energy system Digital Twin decision support tool	
C3.2	Automated machine selection for parts production	
C3.3	Battery production digitalwork instructions & skill capturing	
C3.4	Automated warehouse and internal logistics management	
C4.1	Smart energy management of unplanned machine downtime	
C4.3	Semi-automated EV battery disassembly for recycling	
C4.4	Co-bot refrigerator door assembly solutions	

The AID4SME - Open Call #2 will look to ensure a balanced distribution of applications among challenges. Specific rules are defined in [Section 5](#).

#### 4.3. Funding conditions

Any eligible applicant ([section 4.1.1](#)), applying individually or as part of a consortium ([section 4.1.2](#)), will only be considered for funding once.

Each application will apply for 70% funding of its eligible total project costs (funding rate). **Note that only eligible applicants ([section 4.1.1](#)) may apply for funding.**

**Each application may receive a maximum contribution of up to EUR 200 000.00.** The maximum contribution requested must cover 70% of the project total costs (including indirect costs). All applications will be required to provide a justification of the planned costs and resources of the project.



Funding is foreseen to support the following categories of costs:

- Personnel costs resulting of the development and management activities of the third-party projects;
- Purchase costs necessary to carry out the activities e.g. hardware purchases;
- Travel and subsistence to attend meetings and events.

The type of costs that may be reported include personnel costs, purchase costs (travel and subsistence, equipment - depreciation cost only -, and other direct costs), and indirect costs (25% of personnel and purchase costs). **Subcontracting is not eligible in this open call.**

Funds will be disbursed in lump sums at the end of **periods 1, 2 and 3** ([section 7.2](#)) and pending the achievement of agreed milestones and deliverables.

#### 4.4. Application process

The F6S platform will be the single entry point for all applications to the AID4SME - Open Call #2. Interested applicants should register at the AID4SME F6S page (<https://www.f6s.com/aid4sme-oc-2>). The relevant links and timings for the application process are provided in Table 3, but are subject to change.

Table 3. Application Process and Timeline

Phase	Description	Timeline
<b>Application</b>	Fill in and submit application including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Application form on F6S <a href="https://www.f6s.com/aid4sme-oc-2">[https://www.f6s.com/aid4sme-oc-2]</a>.</li> <li>• Proposal Template (<i>Annex 2. Proposal template</i>)</li> </ul>	Launch date: 15/05/2026 Submission deadline: 15/07/2026 (17h00 CEST)
<b>Eligibility check</b>	AID4SME Consortium performs internal checks the eligibility criteria of the applications	16/07/2026 to 20/07/2026
<b>In/out challenge scope check</b>	AID4SME Consortium performs challenge scope checks of eligible applications	20/07/2026 to 27/07/2026
<b>Application evaluation</b>	An evaluation board reviews eligible and within scope applications, scoring them based on the evaluation criteria. Preliminary rank is defined and highest ranked applications are interviewed by the AID4SME consortium (further details in <a href="#">section 5</a> ).	21/07/2026 to 18/09/2026
<b>Online interviews</b>	Challenge and playground (when applicable) owners interview top-ranked applications from the expert evaluation, scoring them based on the interview evaluation criteria.	31/08/2026 to 04/09/2026
<b>Announcement of the results</b>	All applicants receive a written letter about approval or rejection of their project. The successful projects start the onboarding phase in the AID4SME Programme.	18/09/2026

The submission date for applications is final. All other dates, including those of the programme, may be subject to change.

#### 4.5. Other application requirements and considerations

- **Submission:** Applications must be submitted via <https://www.f6s.com/aid4sme-oc-2>. Any other submission method will not be accepted.
- **Complete application:** All mandatory questions must be answered and all requested documents must be uploaded. Incomplete applications will be disqualified.
- **Accept terms:** Applicants must agree to the application's terms and conditions.
- **English language:** All applications and programme communication must be in English.
- **Document format:** Unless otherwise agreed, all documents in all phases must be submitted electronically in PDF format without printing restrictions.
- **Deadline:**
  - Failure to submit the application by the submission deadline, regardless of cause (e.g., network issues, multiple browsers or windows), is not acceptable as an extenuating circumstance. It is recommended to apply well before the deadline.
  - Resubmissions are possible provided the call deadline has not passed, but are only guaranteed if requested at least 2 business days before the deadline via [support@f6s.com](mailto:support@f6s.com).
  - The deadline may be extended only in case of unforeseen F6S platform technical issues. All applicants will be notified of the new deadline.
- **Review future documents:** Applicants are encouraged to get familiar with the documents that will be required in the contracting phase (see [Section - Contracting Phase](#))
- **Notifications:** Applicants are encouraged to enable F6S notifications for the programme in their profile settings to ensure communications regarding their application are received.
- **Applicants list:** A full list of applicants containing their basic information will be created for statistical and transparency purposes, and shared with the European Commission.
- **AID4SME Open Call #1:** Entities funded within AID4SME Open Call #1 are not eligible under AID4SME Open Call #2.
- **Binding information:** In the unlikely occurrence of a contradiction between the information provided via the OC channels (e-mail, webinars or other means) and the information included in the GfA, the latter is binding.

## 5. How will applications be evaluated and selected?

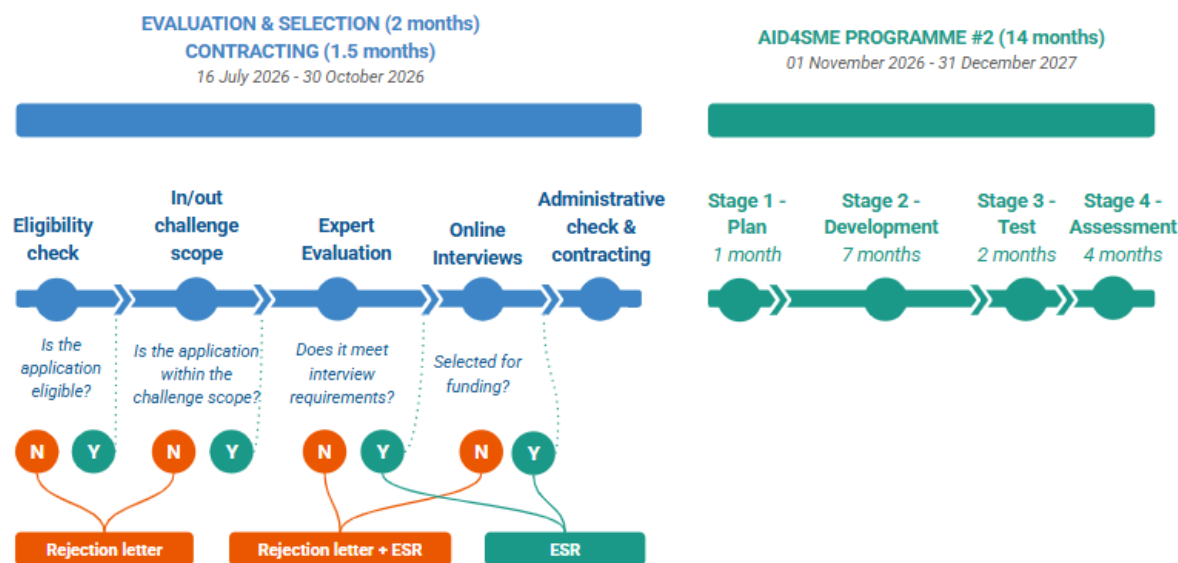


Figure 1. AID4SME Open Call #2 remote evaluation and selection process, and AID4SME Programme #2.

AID4SME consortium reserves the right to request at any moment of the process additional information and/or documentation to clarify any doubts regarding the eligibility of the applicant(s) and/or the application.

### 5.1. Eligibility check

An initial eligibility verification will be done to filter out and discard non-eligible applications. An application is only considered eligible if it meets **all the eligibility criteria and requirements** listed in [Section 4](#), related with: eligible applicant(s) ([section 4.1.1](#)), consortium ([section 4.1.2](#)), countries ([section 4.1.3](#)), multiple applications ([section 4.1.4](#)), type of projects ([section 4.2](#)), funding ([section 4.3](#)), language, documentation, and other application requirements ([section 4.4](#)).

The eligibility check enables the establishment of a shortlist of applications to be verified in the next step of the evaluation process: **in/out challenge scope check** ([section 5.2](#)). Applications marked as non-eligible (for not meeting one or more of the eligibility criteria) will receive a rejection letter with a justification.

### 5.2. In/out challenge scope check

The in/out challenge scope verification will be done to filter out and discard out-of-the-scope applications. An application is only considered within the challenge scope if the proposal description indicated in the application form clearly addresses and aligns with the scope of the selected challenge ([section 3](#)). **Note that the proposal template will not be read as part of this verification process.**

The in/out challenge scope check enables the establishment of a shortlist of applications to be evaluated in the next step of the evaluation process: **expert evaluation** ([section 5.3](#)). Applications marked as out-of-the-scope (for not meeting the challenge scope) will receive a rejection letter with a justification.

### 5.3. Expert evaluation

The expert evaluation board is a collective body composed of individual members with relevant experience in the AID4SME domains and external to the AID4SME consortium, having signed and duly agreed in advance a written commitment of confidentiality and absence of any conflicts of interest that might influence the impartial and objective analysis and evaluation of all submitted proposals.

#### 5.3.1. Evaluation criteria & scoring

Each application will be reviewed by a minimum of two experts from the expert evaluation board. Applications will be scored against the criteria depicted in Table 4.

Table 4: Criteria applied during the expert evaluation phase of the AID4SME - Open Call #2.

Criteria Name	Description
<b>Criterion 1 - Novelty &amp; Innovation (30% weighting)</b>	<p><b>1.1 Methodology</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The extent to which the project's concept advances the current state-of-the-art</li> <li>• Quality of the expected project outcomes</li> <li>• Demonstrated level of project novelty and innovation potential</li> </ul> <p><b>1.2 Technical description of the proposed solution</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear description of the technical capabilities and requirements of the proposed solution and the specific problem it is designed to solve</li> <li>• Identification of the current Technology Readiness Level and supporting evidence of its application that justifies the current technology maturity</li> <li>• Scientific publications related to the proposed solution</li> </ul> <p><b>1.3 Alignment with the selected AID4SME challenge</b></p>
<b>Criterion 2 - Impact (30% weighting)</b>	<p><b>2.1 Contribution to the AID4SME ecosystem and to strengthening the competitiveness and growth of the sector/industry</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The extent to which the project contributes to the AID4SME ecosystem and objectives, as well as on the applicant</li> <li>• The extent to which the project contributes to strengthening the competitiveness and growth of the industry by developing research/ innovations that meet the needs of European and global markets</li> </ul> <p><b>2.2 Exploitation plan and Intellectual Property Rights</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality of the planned activities/ measures to promote the project, and to exploit and disseminate the project results (including management of IPR)</li> <li>• Assessment of any IPR license and the extent to which the AID4SME consortium will be able to use/ integrate the proposed solution</li> </ul> <p><b>2.3 Impact of the proposed solution on green alignment, social and environmental sustainability</b></p>

Criteria Name	Description
<b>Criterion 3 - Implementation (20% weighting)</b>	<p><b>3.1 Work plan</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Description of planned implementation activities and the contribution to tasks of each beneficiary</li> <li>• Relevance of proposed deliverables and milestones to measure achievement of results</li> <li>• Relevance of main critical risks (<i>i.e., likelihood and impact</i>) and quality of proposed mitigation measures</li> </ul> <p><b>3.2 Budget</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear identification and solid justification of the expected project costs</li> <li>• Rationale behind total person-months (full-time equivalent) allocated to the project, as well as to each stage</li> </ul>
<b>Criterion 4 - Team (20% weighting)</b>	<p><b>4.1 Competencies of the core team</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrated expertise, experience and skills of the core team to guarantee a successful project implementation</li> <li>• Demonstrated gender balance within the core team</li> </ul> <p><b>4.1 Capacity of entities and consortium (if applicable) as a whole</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Description of entity(ies) technological and operational capacity to deliver</li> <li>• Demonstrated commitment to achieving the project's objectives</li> </ul>

Table 8 (*item 'Score, Expert'*) defines how individual criteria will be scored. The minimum threshold for each criterion will be **3 (three) out of 5 (five)**, while the overall score threshold will be **9 (nine) out of 15 (fifteen)**. Applications that do not meet the minimum thresholds (per criteria or overall score) will be excluded from the programme. After the individual scoring by the expert evaluation board, the Open Call Management Team will:

- Check for large differences (over 2 points per criterion) between evaluators.
- If differences exist, evaluators meet to discuss and agree on scores (consensus meetings).
- If an agreement is not reached, another expert may be invited to provide a third assessment.

Note that proposals that have passed through the eligibility criteria and in/out challenge scope checks may be discarded based on the expert assessment within this phase ([section 5.1](#) & [section 5.2](#)).

### 5.3.2. Ranking

Applications will be ranked in individual lists per challenge ([section 3](#)) based on their overall score, which is calculated from the average scores given by the evaluators. If multiple applications have the same overall score, the following tie-breaking criteria will be applied in this order:

1. Criterion 1 - Novelty & Innovation
2. Criterion 2 - Impact
3. Criterion 4 - Team
4. Criterion 3 - Implementation

## 5.4. Interview

Table 8 (*item 'Score, Expert'*) defines how individual criteria will be scored. The minimum threshold for each criterion will be **3 (three) out of 5 (five)**, while the overall score threshold will be **9 (nine) out of 15 (fifteen)**. Applications that do not meet the minimum thresholds will be excluded from the programme.

The top-ranked applications of the expert evaluation phase ([section 5.3](#)) will be invited to an online interview. The interviews aim to understand the project concept and alignment to selected challenges, team skills, competence and expertise, and willingness to exploit the results. The interview format, evaluation and scoring, and final ranking process is as follows:

### Interview selection & format:

- The top-3 applications from the remote evaluation are invited to a 30-minute online interview.
- Applicants present their project (15 minutes) and answer questions from the playground (when applicable) and challenge owners (15 minutes).
- Applicants are required to use the provided slide presentation template for the interview.

The AID4SME consortium reserves the right to invite a maximum of 5 applications per topic to the interview phase, particularly if the overall scores from the expert evaluation do not substantially differ.

### Evaluation & scoring:

- Playground (when applicable) and challenge owners evaluate the application and information conveyed in the interview based on the criteria defined in Table 5.
- Interview scores replace the previous expert scores ([section 5.3](#)).
- Failure to meet these or uphold the original application contents leads to the rejection of the application.
- Additional written questions may be requested.

Table 5: Criteria applied at the interview phase of the AID4SME - Open Call #2.

Criteria Name	Description
<b>Criterion 1 - Project concept &amp; alignment (40% weighting)</b>	<p><b>1.1 Technical description of the proposed solution</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear description of the technical capabilities and requirements of the proposed solution and the specific problem it is designed to solve</li> <li>• Identification of the current Technology Readiness Level and supporting evidence of its application that justifies the current technology maturity</li> </ul> <p><b>1.2 Alignment with the selected AID4SME challenge</b></p>
<b>Criterion 2 - Team (30% weighting)</b>	<p><b>2.1 Competencies of the core team</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrated expertise, experience and skills of the core team to guarantee a successful project implementation</li> </ul> <p><b>2.1 Capacity of entities and consortium (if applicable) as a whole</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Description of entity(ies) technological and operational capacity to deliver</li> </ul>

Criteria Name	Description
<b>Criterion 3 - Exploitation plan &amp; IPR (30% weighting)</b>	<b>3.1 Exploitation plan and Intellectual Property Rights</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quality of the planned activities/ measures to exploit and disseminate the project results (including management of IPR)</li> <li>Assessment of any IPR license and the extent to which the AID4SME consortium will be able to use/ integrate the proposed solution</li> </ul>

#### Final ranking of applications:

- Playground (when applicable) and challenge owners discuss and agree on the scores.
- Projects are ranked by their overall score per challenge.
- Ties are broken by prioritising scores from the Expert Evaluation ([section 5.3](#)).

All applicants at all stages of the evaluation will be informed about the result of their evaluation along with an Evaluation Summary Report (ESR).

### 5.5. Appeals

Within three (3) working days of receiving (1) a rejection letter informing the application as non-eligible or (2) an ESR of non-acceptance, an applicant may submit a request for an appeal if they believe the results of the eligibility checks have not been correctly applied, or if they feel that there has been a shortcoming in the way their application has been evaluated.

All requests for appeal must be sent to the Open Call Management Team to [aid4sme\\_ocs\\_appeals@f6s.com](mailto:aid4sme_ocs_appeals@f6s.com) and must:

- Focus on aspects concerning the evaluation of the application (e.g. admissibility or eligibility checks, in/out checks, evaluation procedure, etc), not their merits.
- Clearly describe the complaint.
- Be received within the time limit (3 working days) from the reception of a rejection letter considering the application as non-eligible or the ESR information letter delivered.
- Sent by the entities' legal representative that has also submitted the application.

Note that the evaluation is carried out by highly qualified experts. AID4SME will neither question nor interfere with their original evaluation. Mere repetitions of the content of the application or disagreements with the result or reasoning of the technical evaluation will not be considered.

## 6. What happens after selection?

Selected applicants will be invited to the contracting phase, where administrative and financial details and documents are verified and validated. Furthermore, to carry out mandatory Know Your Customer (KYC) checks, proof of residency and proof of ID from one or more members of the selected entity(ies) is required.

The steps of this phase are (see Table 8 for complementary information):

1. Inclusion of comments (if any) provided in the Evaluation Summary Report as part of the sub-grant agreement (contract - Annex 3).
2. Validation of the entities based on the provision of the following documentation:
  - Formal proof of the entity's legal existence and tax activity.
  - Proof of the SME status, including the SME Declaration Form (Annex 6).
  - Declaration of Honour, for all participating entities, signed by the legal representative of the entity (Annex 4).
  - Consortium Declaration of Honour, signed by the legal representative of each consortium partner (Annex 5).
3. Signing of the sub-grant agreement between AID4SME Consortium represented by its Open Calls Coordinator (F6S EU Tech Innovation Network Designated Activity Company) and the Lead Beneficiary.

Additional considerations:

- A valid VAT is mandatory.
- The sub-grant agreement (contract) is final and cannot be altered.
- Electronic digital signatures are required for signed documents (unless otherwise agreed).
- Deadlines for document submission will be provided, and will normally be concluded within two weeks. Failure to complete the negotiation in time will result in rejection.



## 7. What is the AID4SME - Programme #2 and its requirements?

### 7.1. Programme Stages

The AID4SME Programme includes 4 stages:

1. **Stage 1 - Plan** in M1: beneficiaries will discuss and fine-tune the project's action plan for next stages with mentors and playground owners according to the selected challenge.
2. **Stage 2 - Development** from M2 to M8: beneficiaries will develop the innovative solutions and proceed with integrations at playground owners' sites.
3. **Stage 3 - Testing & Validation** from M9 to M10: beneficiaries will test, validate and demonstrate the solution.
4. **Stage 4 - Solution Assessment & Business Plan** from M11 to M14: beneficiaries will assess and develop a business plan and an exploitation roadmap.

#### 7.1.1. Technical support and mentoring

Each selected project will have at their disposal the following services, infra-structures and mentors from the AID4SME consortium:

- Technical support with expertise in the technologies, engineering integration, testing and validation, and by access to public reusable results
- Technical support with access to the independent testing and validation facilities, so-called low-TRL playgrounds, of the project's scientific partners with specialisations in AI & data technologies for 1) data collection, 2) creation of insights, 3) decision support, and 4) automation.
- Technical and business support from large industry partners that will provide real-life use-cases and will open up their experimental facilities and/or production facilities, so-called high-TRL playgrounds, for testing and validation of the solutions. The industry partners cover the automotive, whitegoods, battery and energy sector.
- An open platform that is flexible to bring in challenges from industries outside the consortium.
- Business support and mentoring to develop business plans and a roadmap to exploitation of the SME solutions.
- Business support with providing the SMEs and Start-ups and their solutions access to the project's connected industry network and DIH networks to increase their market reach, maximise their business opportunities and grow to successful enterprises.

#### 7.1.2. Mandatory deliverables

The following list of deliverables are mandatory:

- **Intellectual Property Agreement** established with playground owners at M4.
- **Test & Validation Report** at M10
- **Business plan and exploitation roadmap** at M14.

### 7.2. Programme review

#### 7.2.1. Review summary

Each project will go through 3 reporting periods linked to installments, each one highlighting the end of a period (Table 6).

Table 6. AID4SME - Program #2 - Review and payments summary

Period	Item	Description
Period 1	<b>Requirement</b>	Action Plan <sup>(a)</sup>
	<b>Result</b>	Payment of 30% of the maximum contribution grant <sup>(b)</sup>
	<b>Period covered</b>	M1
Period 2	<b>Requirement</b>	Progress Report 1 <sup>(a)</sup>
	<b>Result</b>	Payment of 40% of the maximum contribution grant.
	<b>Period covered</b>	From M2 to M8
Period 3	<b>Requirement</b>	Progress Report 2 <sup>(a)</sup>
	<b>Result</b>	Payment of 30% of the maximum contribution grant.
	<b>Period covered</b>	From M9 to M14

a) Templates to be provided by the AID4SME consortium.

b) 10% of the calculated amount is provided as compensation for the work performed during M1, whereas 90% represents a pre-financing payment. The pre-financing amount remains the property of the AID4SME until the final payment.

**Reports must be submitted within 7 working days after the end of each period.** Representatives of the beneficiary may present their work and answer questions during a review meeting.

After approval of the submitted reports and within **5 working days**, the beneficiary should send the relevant payment request document.

In case a project fails to either deliver the required report or the submitted report is rejected, the lead beneficiary will have additional **7 working days** to submit the pending report or an updated version. If after this period, the lead beneficiary fails to deliver the report or the updated version is again rejected, the corresponding installment will be suspended until the next period. Repeated failure in the subsequent period will result in the contract termination.

## 8. What else is important to know?

### 8.1. Intellectual Property Rights (IPR)

Solutions developed and results achieved by the third parties belong to the third parties. Applicants will remain the sole owners of their respective IPRs and retain the IPR for their solutions.

Regarding the evaluation and the review processes, each evaluator will sign an Agreement including confidentiality clauses before receiving access to the applications database to protect the applicants' intellectual property and sensitive non-disclosed information.

### 8.2. On conflicts of interest

Applicants must not have any actual and/or potential conflict of interest with the AID4SME selection process and during the project implementation. All cases of conflict of interest will be assessed case by case.

### 8.3. Ethical issues

AID4SME complies with the fundamental ethical issues particularly those outlined in the "European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity".

- All applicants must submit a self-assessment ethics questionnaire, available in the Proposal Template.

- If the applicant confirms the existence of potential ethical issues, they must contact the AID4SME Helpdesk for guidance, as required.
- The AID4SME will verify the declaration's consistency with the application contents and may contact applicants to resolve any ethical issues.
- Applications that fail to properly address ethical issues or inadequately deal with privacy aspects will be rejected.

#### 8.4. Data protection

In order to process and evaluate applications, and manage project implementation, the AID4SME consortium will need to collect Personal and Industrial Data.

- F6S Network Ireland Limited will act as Data Controller for data submitted through the F6S platform for these purposes. Please see our privacy policy [here](#).
- A Data Protection Officer (DPO) has been appointed by F6S generally, to ensure compliance with data protection regulations, such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and that personal data is collected, processed, and stored in a secure manner.
- The F6S platform's system design and operational procedures ensure that data is managed in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR).
- Each applicant will accept the F6S terms to ensure compliance. Please refer to <https://www.f6s.com/privacy-policy> to review the F6S platform's privacy policy and data security policy.
- Apart from the F6S platform, data will also be stored in the F6S Google Drive, and in the project repository on Sharepoint managed by the project coordinator Katholieke Universiteit Leuven.
- Note that the AID4SME consortium must retain generated data until five years after the balance of the AID4SME project is paid or longer if there are ongoing procedures (such as audits, investigations or litigation). In this case, the data must be kept until their conclusion.

#### 8.5. Confidentiality

Confidentiality obligations:

- Selected applicants are required to maintain confidential any project data, documents, invoices and other materials (in any form) during the implementation of the activities and for 5 years after project completion.
- This confidentiality period can be extended by agreement with the EC and the AID4SME consortium.
- Information shared during the project, whether written or spoken, is only considered confidential if the AID4SME agrees and confirms it in writing within 15 days.
- Confidential information must only be used for project implementation, unless otherwise agreed upon.
- Any information shared during the application stage will be treated as confidential.

#### 8.6. Promotion of the action and ensuring visibility of the EU funding

The beneficiary must promote the project, the AID4SME project and its results, by providing targeted information to multiple audiences (including the media and the public) in a strategic and effective manner and to highlight the financial support of the EC, including on the official third party website. The AID4SME Communication team will guide and support these communication activities to selected beneficiaries.

### 8.7. Checks and reviews

The EC may, at any time during the implementation of the sub-project and up to five years after the end of the sub-project, arrange for a check and review activity to be carried out, by external auditors, or by the EC services themselves, including the European Anti-Fraud office (OLAF). The procedure shall be deemed to be initiated on the date of receipt of the relevant letter sent by the EC.

There will be no financial checks, reviews, or audits to check costs, since beneficiaries have no obligation to document the costs incurred for the action. Checks, reviews, and audits will focus on the technical implementation of the action.

## 9. Relevant links and contacts

The AID4SME Consortium will provide information to the applicants via the F6S page, so that all information (questions and answers) are visible to all participants.

- Project website: <https://aid4sme.eu/>
  - Open call application form: <https://www.f6s.com/aid4sme-oc-2/apply>
  - Contact us: [aid4sme\\_ocs\\_helpdesk@f6s.com](mailto:aid4sme_ocs_helpdesk@f6s.com)
  - Online Q&A/ discussion board: <https://www.f6s.com/aid4sme-oc-2/discuss>
  - F6S platform support team: [support@f6s.com](mailto:support@f6s.com)
- (For issues with the submission, resubmission, access to the platform, etc.)*

## Relevant Open Call definitions

Table 7. Acronyms &amp; Definitions

Acronym	Explanation/ Definition
<b>AI</b>	Artificial Intelligence
<b>AID4SME</b>	enabling SMEs to develop AI and DATA solutions through support of a Community of Practice and low-TRL and high-TRL playgrounds
<b>AWU</b>	Annual Work Unit
<b>COP</b>	Community of Practice
<b>DIH</b>	Digital Innovation Hub
<b>EC</b>	European Commission
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>GA</b>	Grant Agreement
<b>IPR</b>	Intellectual Property Rights
<b>SME</b>	Small and Medium Sized Enterprise
<b>ESR</b>	Evaluation Summary Report
<b>KPI</b>	Key Performance Indicators
<b>KYC</b>	Know Your Customer
<b>TRL</b>	Technology Readiness Level

Table 8. Terms &amp; Definitions

Term	Definition
<b>Applicant(s)</b>	The legal entity or group of legal entities that intend(s) to submit or that submitted an application to the Open Call.
<b>Application Eligibility Criteria</b>	Criteria used to assess if an application can be considered for the open call. Possible values (Yes/No).
<b>Application Eligible or Non-Eligible</b>	Application that is or is not compliant with eligibility criteria.
<b>Application Timestamp</b>	Timestamp of the final submission of an application. If the application is reopened and resubmitted the last date will be considered.
<b>Bank Account Information</b>	Document(s) where the beneficiary provides information of the bank account to which payments will be made during the project implementation.
<b>Beneficiary or 3rd Party</b>	An entity or a consortium that submitted an application to the open call that was accepted to be funded, and have signed, or are in the process of signing, a sub-grant agreement.
<b>Consortium</b>	Set of legal entities that are cumulatively responsible to implement the project as defined in the Grant Agreement signed with the European Commission.
<b>Consortium Declaration of Honour</b>	Declaration where the applicants/ beneficiaries, participating as a consortium, declare they accept all conditions of the open call, acceleration process & programme; and agree - if applicable - on budget share. One CDoH is required for each sub-granted project.

Term	Definition
<b>Contract Deadline</b>	Date and time until when the selected entities need to provide contractual information.
<b>Declaration of Honour (DoH)</b>	Declaration where the applicant/ beneficiary declares they accept all conditions of the open call, acceleration process & programme. One DoH is required for each applicant/ beneficiary.
<b>External Evaluator</b>	Expert hired by the consortium to assist in the evaluation of the Open Call. External evaluators cannot have conflicts of interest and are bound by a confidentiality agreement.
<b>F6S Application Form</b>	Application form available in F6S Platform.
<b>F6S Platform</b>	Platform provided by F6S.
<b>FSTP</b>	Financial support to third parties. Payments made to entities that are not members of the consortium.
<b>FSTP – Lump Sum</b>	Payment made to the third party based on the achievement of a milestone.
<b>Internal evaluation committee</b>	Group of appropriately qualified persons of the consortium partners that are assigned the responsibility of performing evaluations or reviews at any stage of the open call implementation or programme.
<b>Mentor</b>	Person from the consortium that works closely with the beneficiary to foster communication with the consortium and assess progress of the project. The mentor may be part of an evaluation committee.
<b>Open Call</b>	Competitive process to access a Programme.
<b>Open Call and Programme deadlines</b>	The project has planned the programme carefully, but unexpected things can happen. The application deadline is fixed, and will only change if something unforeseen occurs. Other dates, including of the programme, are flexible and may be adjusted as needed, and communicated to all applicants.
<b>Open Call close date</b>	Date and time when applications close.
<b>Open Call selection prioritisation</b>	Rules used to order applications.
<b>Proof of Legal Existence</b>	Company/ organisation register, official journal or other official document per country showing the name of the organisation, the legal address and registration number and a copy of a document proving VAT registration (in case the VAT number does not show on the registration extract or its equivalent).
<b>Proof of SME Status</b>	<p>Proof of the SME condition is required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the applicant has been fully validated as an SME on the Beneficiary Register of the EC Participant Portal, the PIC number must be provided.</li> <li>• Provision of the signed (with a valid e-signature) <b>SME Declaration</b> (Annex 6): in the event the beneficiary declares being non-autonomous, the balance sheet and profit and loss account (with annexes) for the last period for upstream and downstream organisations is required. A Status Information Form may be requested, which includes the headcount (AWU), balance, profit &amp; loss accounts of the latest closed financial year and the relation, upstream and downstream, of any linked or partner company.</li> </ul>

Term	Definition
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supporting documents: In cases where either the number of employees or the ownership is not clearly identified: any other supporting documents which demonstrate headcount and ownership such as payroll details, annual reports, national regional, association records, etc.</li> </ul>
<b>Reserve List</b>	Eligible applications that were not selected for funding which can be invited in case selected applications do not provide contractual data.
<b>Schedule for payments to Beneficiaries</b>	<p>All payments to beneficiaries are dependent on the successful review of deliverables/ reports at the end of each sprint, and reception by the consortium of the corresponding payment request.</p> <p>All payments will be made with undue delay preferably no later than 30 calendar days after the reception of the financial statement.</p>
<b>Score, Expert</b>	<p>Unless otherwise stated, experts will rank each criterion with marks between 0 and 5. Half point scores are not given. Score values will indicate the following assessments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>0: Fail. The application fails to address the criterion under examination or cannot be judged due to missing or incomplete information.</li> <li>1: Very poor. The criterion is addressed in an unsatisfactory manner.</li> <li>2: Poor. There are serious inherent weaknesses.</li> <li>3: Good. While the application broadly addresses the criterion, there are significant weaknesses that would need correcting.</li> <li>4: Very Good. The application addresses the criterion well, although certain improvements are possible.</li> <li>5: Excellent. The application successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion in question. Any shortcomings are minor.</li> </ul>
<b>Score, Per Committee</b>	<p>When the evaluation is made by a committee, the average score of each criterion is rounded to two decimal places, before computing the overall score.</p> <p>Overall score is the sum of the scores of each criterion multiplied by the respective weight.</p>
<b>Selected application</b>	Application that was selected to participate in the Open Call Implementation.
<b>SME</b>	An incorporated enterprise that complies with the rules defined by the European Commission to be qualified as an SME <sup>2</sup>
<b>SME – Autonomous Enterprise</b>	An autonomous enterprise is not a partner with or linked to another enterprise
<b>SME – Linked Enterprise</b>	Linked enterprises are those that form a group through the direct or indirect control of the majority of voting rights of an enterprise by another or through the ability to exercise a dominant influence on an enterprise.
<b>SME – Partner Enterprise</b>	The enterprise holds a minimum of 25% (Capital or voting rights in another enterprise, or 25% (Capital or voting rights) are owned by another enterprise.
<b>SME Declaration Form</b>	Declaration where the SME status is assessed.

<sup>2</sup> [https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/smes/sme-fundamentals/sme-definition\\_en](https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/smes/sme-fundamentals/sme-definition_en)



Term	Definition
<b>Sub-grant Agreement</b>	Signed between the Project Consortium, represented by its Coordinator and the beneficiary. The sub-grant agreement will also include the comments (if any) of the application's ESR to the work plan.
<b>Sub-granted Project</b>	The project that has been selected and awarded, implemented according to the approved work plan, and in accordance with the signed Sub-grant Agreement.