

Version 5
18 March 2026



ERDF Interregional Innovation Investments Instrument (I3)

Further clarifications on
Calls I3-2026-Cap2b
(Q&A document)

This document compiles Questions and Answers (Q&As) from similar calls from the previous years as well as Q&As from the info day of 19 November 2025

All new Q&As to be submitted to EISMEA will be added in this document, which will be updated on a regular basis.

New Q&As in each new version are highlighted.

Section 0 – Introduction

This document is based on the questions asked by participants to the I43- CAP2B info session held online on 19 November 2025. The recording is available on EISMEA website

Section 1 – Background

Section 2 - Objectives — Themes and priorities — Activities that can be funded —Expected impact

Under I3 -2026 -CAP2b call, is EISMEA offering pre-proposal checks during the opening period of the call?

EISMEA does not have the capacities to offer preproposals checks. Advice could be offered by the members of the [I3 expert group](#) appointed by MS or representing EU umbrella organisations.

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, must all KPIs be addressed or are these are only suggestions on what dimensions should be targeted?

The KPIs listed in section 2 of the call document (page 11) is **non-exhaustive** and relate to the situation at the end of the project. Proposals are encouraged to identify the KPIs most relevant to them and/or further ones not listed in the call document. So, there is no mandatory and fixed list of KPIs. Evaluating experts will evaluate the appropriateness of the KPIs, given the objectives of the proposal.

Under I3-2026-Cap2b, can costs be reimbursed that are related to the setting up and running of a knowledge hub/open innovation platform?

Yes, the costs are eligible if this hub/platform support(s) the main call objective (building capacity in less developed regions) to **develop and strengthen their regional innovation ecosystems and value chains** through coordinated and interlinked investments in several regions. In line with the Oslo manual, I3 supports any type of innovation approach, including open innovation.

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, is the writing of the actual application for a future I3 Instrument investments call (Strand 1/2a) an eligible task?

Under section 2, the call document mentions **activities that can be funded**. Under the **core actions** (pillar 2 - supporting the development of interregional investment projects) and the **support actions** (pillar 4 - networking and staff exchange schemes), this kind of activity may be an eligible task. However, it must be clear from the application to what extent the activity effectively increases the call relevant **long-term capacity of the involved partners** and its staff, especially from less developed regions

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, how many (minimum and maximum number of) activities listed on pages 9-11 should we select?

There is no minimum and maximum number of activities. However, to promote a balanced approach and ensure a broader impact, **proposals must combine core and support actions**. Moreover, activities need to follow the award criteria mentioned in section 9 of the call document.

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, what is the difference between "Test/pilot funding initiatives for innovation ecosystems" and "Pre-piloting of investment ideas under development and validation of the assumptions with the implementing actors and ecosystems"?

The activity "**Test and pilot funding initiatives for innovation ecosystems**" belongs to the Core Pillar 1 and is therefore related to **ecosystem building and connection**. This means that the piloting itself is not yet implemented but the planning of (interregional) activities that will enable the preparation of those pilots. On the other hand, the "**Pre-piloting of the investment ideas**" is related to the Core Pillar 2 "**Supporting the development of interregional investment projects**" and therefore closer to the (pre-)piloting of the investment cases.

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, is it possible to have a consortium composed of clusters only?

This is theoretically possible if the minimum eligibility criteria are respected (section 6 of the call document). However, projects must ensure the active involvement of **quadruple-helix stakeholders** including companies and civil society, alongside public administrations, academia, end users and other relevant stakeholders (section 2 of the call document) (see also section 6).

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, are Social Innovation projects eligible to participate?

Yes, please check section 2 in the chapter **Themes and priorities** (scope). Any type of innovation in line with the Oslo manual is accepted under I3.

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, are thematic projects (e.g. energy, water, culture), possible the focus should be on governance, etc.?

All of the above is possible. All depends on the strengths and needs of each particular EU region. Thematic projects must **reinforce the regional innovation ecosystems internally** (including governance) in order to better connect them externally for joint interregional innovation investments. Please read section 2 of the call document (Objectives)

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b; is building capacity on a specific innovation a topic in line with the call?

Building innovation capacities in the less developed region is in line with the call text, even when the proposal targets one specific innovation sector (e.g. water) or a specific innovation type (e.g. product innovation, process innovation, organisational innovation, service innovation, social innovation). However, it is essential that the project output are investment capacities and a pipeline of business investments coherent with the green or digital transition or on smart manufacturing.

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, what if the proposal focusses on two regions with local clusters and authorities as partners, but some partners (SMEs and universities) are from other regions?

This is possible, as long as the minimum eligibility criteria of section 6 are respected. However, the role of each entity and region should be well explained in the proposal.

Under I3-2026-Cap2b call, if the objective of our proposal is to create a regional 4 helix cluster in a LDR (because we don't have one existent yet), is this call the right one?

Yes, this could be the right call, because this call is also about **strengthening the capacity of regions and their stakeholders** to build up well performing regional innovation ecosystems. It is recommendable to have high-capacity partners (also from more developed and transition regions in the consortium) to help advising.

Section 3 – Available budget

What is the expected project budget for Cap 2b projects?

The requested grant amount is expected to range between EUR 500,000 and EUR 1,500,000 (indicative). It is **possible to request other amounts** and the budget should be in line with the size of the consortium and the ambitions defined in the project workplan.

Section 4 – Timetable and deadlines

Under I3-2026 CAP2b call, an action plan for the improvement of the regional innovation ecosystem' is a mandatory deliverable. How comprehensive is this action plan expected to be and when is it expected to be delivered?

The action plan is expected to be included in a comprehensive deliverable implemented in the framework of a WP and included in the deliverables with concrete planned actions. A first draft is due at the beginning of the project and an updated version is due at right before the end of the project.

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, can you please share the date of publication, the deadline for proposal submission and the expected project duration.

Opening date: 23/10/2025

Closing date: 19/03/2026

Expected project duration: Projects should range **between 18 and 24 months**. Proposals with a different duration can be considered. Extensions are possible, if duly justified and through an amendment of the grant agreement.

Section 5 - Admissibility and documents

Document Submission Requirements under I3-2026-CAP2b:

What documents are mandatory for submission under this call?

Application Form Part A, Part B, Part C and mandatory documents (detailed budget table, endorsement letter from S" competent body)

(See I3-2026-CAP2b call text Section 5)

Are CVs required, and if so, for which positions should they be included?

CVs are not mandatory annexes but a short description of the key staff can be mentioned in the proposal to prove the operational capacity (see I3-2026-CAP2b, call text section 7). This will be assessed under “quality”

Is it necessary to submit an Annual Activity Report, and is there a specific template to follow?

This is not compulsory

Under I3-2026-CAP2b call how should the Q-Helix ecosystems be represented in the consortium? Can one single company participate without other quadruple helix ecosystems actors? Is a letter of support from the S3 competent body necessary?

The consortium should represent the demand and the supply side, including (ideally) all the actors of the Q-Helix ecosystem as full partners, third parties or associated entities. One letter of endorsement from the competent body for Smart Specialisation is mandatory (one letter per region, mentioning all the partners from the same region) un I3-2026-Cap 2b.

Under I3-2026-CAP2b call can letter of support be provided by national/regional entities other than the S3 authority?

The support letter should be provided by the S3 competent body, the managing authority or other national or regional authority that can certify the relevance of the project for the Smart Specialisation of the given region.

Under I3 2026 Cap 2b call, are European associations and interest groupings eligible? Are actions implemented by their members eligible for founding under the umbrella of the association? Do they need a support letter from Brussels capital region of other regions where they are legally established?

Entities composed of members may participate as ‘sole beneficiaries’ or ‘beneficiaries without legal personality’.

Please note that. If the action is implemented by the members, they should also formally participate in the project (either as beneficiaries or as affiliated entities, otherwise their costs will NOT be eligible). A letter of support is not requested for the European association but Member of association actively involved in the project must provide an endorsement letter to prove the relevance of the projects for their S3 strategy.

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, can you please give guidance on how we should proceed with letters of support from regional authorities where our specific sector is not mentioned within their current smart specialisation strategy, or where there is not a current smart specialisation strategy. Some regional authorities seem reluctant to engage, fearing this is committing them to further work for which they are not funded / have not allocated resources. How should we proceed with them / what can we say to them to write in the letter of endorsement?

Even if it is not possible to oblige a regional authority to confirm the full alignment of the project's theme with the smart specialisation strategy of its region, the authority can possibly confirm the project's **complementarity** to the region's S3 strategy. In the template, there is a field below the two tick boxes, where the **authority can comment** more precisely about the reality in its region. EISMEA confirms that, for the region, by signing the letter of support, **there is not a legal obligation and/or commitment to co-fund a project**, even if this would be helpful for it. A regional endorsement can be given to public or private entities.

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, is it possible to submit endorsement letters after the submission deadline?

The EU Funding & Tenders Portal closes at the submission deadline and it is then no longer possible to submit endorsement letters via the submission tool. EISMEA reserves the right to send a notification to all applicants to submit their missing endorsement letters.

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, when the consortium includes organisations with main seat in one region but with members in other regions where the project activities take place, which authority shall provide the support letter?

The support letter needs to be provided from the responsible **authority of the region** where the member carrying out the work has its **seat**.

This means that you can put as main organisation the city/region where the **main seat** is but please indicate also the city/region of the department **where the project activities take place** (Part A - edit forms).

This can be the case e.g. for organisations such as clusters, associations, EIT networks, etc.

Under call I3-2023-Cap2b, when the consortium includes organisations with main seat in one region but with members in other regions where the project activities take place, which authority shall provide the support letter?

The support letter needs to be provided from the responsible authority where the member carrying out the work has its seat. This means that you can put as main organisation the city/region where the main seat is but please indicate also the city/region of the department where the project activities take place (Part A - edit forms). This can be the case e.g. for organisations such as clusters, associations, EIT networks, etc.

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, is it possible to delete instructions from the application form?

As indicated on page 1 of the application form, please do not delete any instructions in the document. The overall page limit has been raised to ensure equal treatment of all applicants.

Please check the [call document](#) (page 15)

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, should the project's communication and dissemination plan be foreseen as a separate work package within the project proposal or is it advisable to integrate these activities into other work packages?

Both is possible. However, it might be easier for the external evaluator to assess the communication and dissemination related activities if there is a separate work package

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, must we follow the instructions and guidelines in each (sub--section) of the application template?

The instructions and guidelines in each (sub- section) of the application template will give you a useful structure for writing your proposal. It is according to these instructions and guidelines that the evaluators will assess your proposal in the light of the call objectives.

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, what is the main difference between the project methodology and the description of the WP activities? What are the evaluation aspects when the quality of the project methodologies is checked by the evaluators?

In the section 2.1 of the application form you describe the overall **methodology** used during the project at a general level. In section 5.2 you describe the methodologies and activities per each WP in more detail.

The **evaluation criteria** (relevance, quality, cost effectiveness and impact) are listed directly in the application form on top of each (sub-)section.

Endorsement Letters:

Should all consortium members provide an S3 endorsement letter, or only those representing regions where project activities will take place?

Under I3 -2026-Cap2b call the endorsement letter is required for all consortium members per region represented in the consortium (see section 5 of the call text)

For a consortium only involved in support activities, is it necessary to submit an S3 endorsement letter?

Yes, see section 5 of the call text

Project Activity Locations:

If a coordinator is based in one region but activities are planned in other regions, are endorsement letters needed from both the coordinator's region and the regions where activities will occur?

Under I3 -2026-Cap2b call the endorsement letter is required for all consortium members per region represented in the consortium (see section 5 of the call text)

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, how many endorsement letters do we have to upload?

As stated in the call document, the **endorsement letter** is required **per each regional innovation ecosystem at appropriate NUTS level**. This means that different participants from one specific region only have to provide **one single endorsement letter per region**. Example: when there are 7 consortium members from 4 regions, you need 4 endorsement letters from the public authorities responsible for the respective regional smart specialisation strategies (S3).

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, how do applicants have to upload the explicit consent of all applicants of their proposal to act on their behalf, further declarations on the completeness/correctness of their proposal and the compliance of eligibility rules, etc.?

When editing the application forms directly in the **EU Funding & Tenders portal submission tool**, the coordinator directly **ticks the boxes confirming these declarations**. There is no declaration upload to make

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, where can I get more information about the authority responsible for the regional smart specialisation strategy (S3) - for example to obtain the endorsement letter?

Please consult the **Smart specialisation S3 Community of Practice (CoP) Observatory** under [this link](#). The S3 CoP Secretariat can be reached for all further inquiries via contact@s3-cop.eu. In case the public authority you contacted is not mentioned under the above link, EISMEA reserves the right to accept endorsement letters from other **relevant public authorities** in your region/country (for example if the information in the above link is not updated correctly).

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, how many previous projects should be mentioned in the Annex?

This annex has been deleted from the application. You can optionally mention previous projects in the main application form.

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, do annexes count towards the 70 pages limit? Where do annexes have to be uploaded?

Annexes do not count towards the 70 pages limit of Part B. They must be uploaded in the EU Funding & Tenders submission tool. There are separate dedicated fields for the **Part B**, the **detailed budget table** and the **letters of support** (MS S3 endorsement).

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, if one partner in the consortium is a smart specialisation strategy S3 regional authority, is it still compulsory to provide the endorsement letter from this participating region?

In that case an endorsement letter from that region is not compulsory but may be uploaded if wished so.

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, where can I find the S3 smart specialisation strategy endorsement letter to be filled in by the S3 authority?

You can download the editable version by starting an application in the EU Funding & Tenders Portal. You will then find it in a zip file together with the application form and the detailed budget table.

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, regarding the template for the endorsement letter, should the details in the field related to the project coordinator be from the coordinator or from the relevant partner?

In the field related to the project coordinator, only the name of the Primary Coordinator Contact (PCoCo) and his/her organisation name must be inserted. Please check the template in the Part B zip package, whose instructions are clear.

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, can we re-use the letters of support from a previously submitted proposal under a different call, considering that the proposal title and the coordinator have not changed?

You may use the already existing letters of support if all details are very similar (i.e. competent authority for the S3 management of the region, coordinator, proposal name and proposal activities).

Section 6 – Eligibility

Are Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) eligible for funding under I3-2026 Cap2b call?

Yes, they are eligible (see Section 6, page 15 of the call document).

Under the call I3-2026-CAP2B - CAPACITY BUILDING (I3-2026-CAP2B) are “transition” regions eligible as project coordinators? What is their role in the consortium? Are they assimilated to MDR and expected to support LDR?

Transition regions are expected to support partner from LDRs (likewise the partners from “more developed” regions). Section 6 of the call document (Eligibility) clearly mentions that the coordinator must be established in a LDR or outermost region.

Should entities from outside of the EU implement part of the activities in the EU territory, would they be eligible for the EU funding under I3-2026-Cap2b,?

Entities from outside the EU can participate as associated partners but they cannot claim costs. Should those entities have a department/subsidiary with a seat in the EU, they would be eligible.

Concerning subcontractors, they do not necessarily need to have their seat in the EU, but they should not be pre-identified before the project (open calls better respect the best value for money principle).

Under the call I3-2026-CAP2B - CAPACITY BUILDING , are startups eligible for I3 projects?

Yes, startups are eligible for I3 Capacity building projects.

Under the I3-2026-CAP2B call, can a topic-specific approach (e.g. water) be considered eligible to build innovation capacities in LDRs?

Yes, this approach is accepted, if this is somehow related to the smart manufacturing topic or relevant for the digital or green transition. The capacity building activities must include at least one core action (Ecosystem building and connection or Investment Project Identification)

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, it is stated that the consortium must ‘[represent] at least one “less developed region” and one “more developed region” of an EU Member State’.

We would like to clarify whether:

1. **The consortium must, at least, integrate one ‘less developed’ and one ‘more developed’ region from the same EU Member State, OR**
2. **The ‘less developed’ and ‘more developed’ regions can be from different EU Member States, if both types of regions are represented.**

The entity from a **more developed region** can be from the same or from a different EU Member State than the entity from a less developed region. However, keep in mind that the consortium as a whole must be composed as a **minimum of two independent legal entities** representing **two regional ecosystems** from **two different eligible countries**.

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, who can apply? Can it be one person or a consortium? What are the requirements for the composition of the consortium?

Please read pages 16-17 of the [call document](#) (section 6).

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, is there a limited number of partners from one country?

There is no limitation for the number of partners from one country but you need to respect the minimum requirements on pages 16-17 of the [call document](#) (section 6)

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, can you provide information on how binding the project in terms of the countries is, meaning e.g., if the coordinator would need to change to another country. Currently, this is not planned but personal situations might require that.

During the project, if a beneficiary and/or coordinator changes its seat to another region, this may have an effect in the sense that major changes to the project activities and its locations should be limited. The original award decision to the project should not be put into question. In case such a change is nevertheless necessary, the coordinator needs to get in touch as soon as possible with the EISMEA Project adviser to discuss the situation and mitigation measures. In case the change is accepted and the entity moves to another region, a new letter of support is needed from the relevant S3 managing authority.

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, could you please confirm whether a beneficiary validated as a natural person would be eligible to apply for the call?

This is possible as explained in section 6 of the call document: i.e. as sole traders, where the company does not have the legal personality separate from that of the natural person.

This case is different from that of an SME owner, whereby the company has a legal personality separate from that of the related natural person.

Please check the [Annotated Model Grant Agreement](#)

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, can large companies or its subsidiaries also participate in the consortium? Or is the call limited to SMEs?

Yes, large companies and/or its subsidiaries can participate in the consortium. For the consortium, please make sure to explain its composition and the role that the different partners play to achieve the call objectives.

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, is it enough to have a public authority as an associated partner to fulfil the requirement regarding the quadruple helix stakeholders?

There is no strict eligibility criterion to have all four parts of a quadruple helix ecosystem represented in the consortium. Public partners can also be associated to the project and play a role without receiving an EU grant. However, the call document states (Section 6) that any proposal must include innovation intermediaries in the consortium as partners (so at least one) with an umbrella role (e.g., clusters representing companies, universities, RTOs, innovation

agencies - the list is not exhaustive) to maximise the representation of quadruple helix stakeholders from less developed regions.

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, is the writing of the actual application for a future I3 Instrument investments call (Strand 1/2a) an eligible task?

Please see the reply under Section 2

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, our cluster has its legal office in a more developed region, but has members, within the same country, that are in less developed regions. Should we consider this cluster as more developed or less developed?

According to the call document, entities composed of members such as **clusters** may participate as 'sole beneficiaries' or even as 'beneficiaries without legal personalities. Please note that if the action will be implemented by the members, they should also participate (either as beneficiaries or as affiliated entities, otherwise their costs will not be eligible). This means that several entities/members from the one cluster can be partners in the same consortium. In that case, each entity/member's is counted where it has its seat, and this defines the participating region and its economic development status.

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, can the coordinator come from a region that is categorised as "transition" or "more developed" if it has competencies and expertise in a region categorised as "less developed"?

According to the call document (section 6, page 16), the seat of the coordinating entity must be in a region that is categorised as "less developed"; in line with [COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING DECISION \(EU\) 2021/1130](#). However, the entity from a transition or more developed region can join the consortium as a normal partner.

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, do we need to only have less developed regions represented or can we also integrate more advanced regions supporting less developed regions gaining capacities?

A lot depends on the project specificities and needs of the targeted less developed regions, but you need to have **at least one more developed region** according to section 6 of the call document. Entities from more developed regions can facilitate the uptake of good practices.

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, what are the I3 associated countries (non-EU Member States)?

Associated countries are non EU countries that have signed formal agreements to participate in specific EU programs. They contribute financially to the EU budget, allowing their entities to access funding and collaborate with EU beneficiaries. However, **there are currently no non-EU countries associated to the I3 Instrument** (Art 13 ERDF)

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, where can I check which cohesion status my region has?

Please consult [COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING DECISION \(EU\) 2021/1130](#).

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, is it possible to have a consortium composed of clusters only?

This is theoretically possible if the minimum eligibility criteria are respected (section 6 of the call document). However, projects must ensure the active involvement of companies and civil society, alongside public administrations, academia, and other **quadruple-helix stakeholders** (section 2 of the call document) (see also section 2).

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, is a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) eligible in this call? If yes, is there any conflict of interest if one of the members of this EGTC is also a member of the proposed consortium?

Associations and interest groupings such as an EGTC that are composed of members may participate as ‘sole beneficiaries’ or ‘beneficiaries without legal personality. There is no conflict of interest, if in addition EGTC members are partners in the consortium. It is even necessary that these members are partners in the project otherwise their costs for implemented activities will not be eligible.

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, can I contribute as an independent scientist (freelance)? My skills match I3 requirements & I own IPs which can add value to existing/new projects.

Natural persons alone cannot be members of a consortium, but SME owners not receiving a salary can. Freelancers can also be hired for the duration of the project under staff category A2 – natural persons working under a direct contract (see section 6 of the call document).

Section 7 - Financial and operational capacity and exclusion

Financial Assessment:

How does the financial status of a non-profit organisation impact its eligibility or assessment under this call?

Applicants must have stable and sufficient resources to successfully implement the projects and contribute . Financial capacity check are carried out during the grant agreement preparation. Specific measures are taken in case the financial capacity is not satisfactory (see section 7 of the call text)

Are there specific criteria that organisations need to meet in terms of market revenue or EU grants to comply with the call requirements?

Specific rules for “Financial capacity assessment” are mentioned in the section 7 of the call text

Under the call I3-2026-CAP2B - CAPACITY BUILDING , how can newly established startups (that does not have a closed financial year yet or recorded revenue) prove their Financial Capacity?

The financial capacity assessment may only be requested in case the non-public entity is part of a consortium of a funded proposal during the grant agreement preparation. In case of “insufficient” or “weak” financial capacity assessment, EISMEA reserves the right for further measures to protect the EU financial interests.

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, is it possible to undergo a legal validation by the Research Executive Agency (REA) before proposal submission?

The REA Central Validation Service currently prioritises participants actively involved in grant preparations. You can submit a project proposal even if your entity is not yet validated. Once the validation of your organisation will be required, you will be contacted by the REA Central Validation Service. The validation of your organisation will be performed only if and when your proposal is selected for funding.

For further information, please check the EU Funding & Tenders Portal [online manual](#).

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, if a proposal gets funded, is it possible to change the individuals who will implement the project or do they have to be the same persons than in the application?

The project staff members in the consortium can change, if the overall operational capacity of the project consortium stays intact. In case the primary coordinator contact changes, the coordinating organisation is encouraged to indicate a future change as soon as possible to the EU Project officer.

Section 8 - Evaluation and award procedure

How are proposals assessed?

Admissible and eligible proposals are evaluated by 3 independent experts against operational capacity and award criteria (Relevance, Quality, Cost Effectiveness and Impact) and ranked according to their scores.

In case of equal scoring, how are proposals ranked?

The priority order will be established taking into account the highest scores on “geographical diversity”, “Impact”, “Relevance” and “gender balance” (see call text session 8)

Section 9 – Award criteria

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, what is the main difference between the project methodology and the description of the WP activities? What are the evaluation aspects when the quality of the project methodologies is checked by the evaluators?

See the reply in section 5

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, are projects following up existing I3 Instrument projects or being supported under a S3 thematic partnership evaluated more positively?

There is no general reply to that question and it very much depends on how well the proposal responds to the 4 award criteria in section 9 of the call document.

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, must the balance of regions be more LDRs + TRs than MDRs?

There is no general reply to that question and it very much depends on how well the proposal responds to the 4 award criteria in section 9 of the call document. The minimum eligibility requirements of section 6 must be fulfilled, though.

Section 10 - Legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements

Under I3-2026-CAP2b can the same person be the contact person for the project coordinator and at the same time be project technical coordinator for another partner?

Please refer to the [Annotated grant agreement](#) in the personnel costs section.

Under I3-2026 -CAP2b call, associated partners participate in the consortium without any grant support. However, their participation in relevant events might be needed to complement the expertise of the Q-helix ecosystems or to allow regional/national authorities to provide policy advise to the project. In this case, is it possible to foresee, under the budget of project beneficiaries some travel costs to cover the cost for their participation?

Do not add associated partners to the proposal if you want to claim costs for them. Only 3rd parties that are not associated partners can be reimbursed through the related project beneficiary. These costs should be claimed by the partner responsible for the implementation of the specific action (e.g. subcontracting costs for the organisation of an advisory group, or travel costs, etc)

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, will the funding only be attributed by the European Commission (EC) / Executive Agency, and therefore, no funding will be requested at national level? Will the funding be attributed by the EC / Executive Agency at 100%?

As explained in Section 10 (page 22) of the call document, project costs will be reimbursed by the EU Funding authority at the funding rate of up to 100%. So, there is not necessarily a need for own resources. However, you have the option to implement extra project related activities with your own resources (not mentioned in the budget table).

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, can a project staff member be employed by two different project partners participate in the project?

If this is allowed according to the national accountancy roles of your country/region, this is possible. Please be careful not to request cost reimbursement for the same activity twice. This would be double funding and will lead to ineligibility of costs and/or issues for the involved organisations in case of an EU audit.

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, do we need to have a separate Work Package (WP) for Communication & Dissemination, or does it have to be distributed in corresponding work packages to prove the direct impact of the specific WP?

You can have it in one dedicated WP or explained in every WP. However, according to the call document, you need to have a mandatory deliverable on the dissemination plan (section 10 of the call document). This deliverable will have to be linked to one or several work packages (see above). Normally, there is only one dissemination plan. The application form also requires the description of the Communication & Dissemination activities in part 4.2 (Impact criterion).

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, are unit costs mandatory or an option? If the unit costs are indeed mandatory, do they then require reporting and proofs during project reports?

Unit costs are mandatory for to declare travel, subsistence and accommodation expenses for all Single Market Programme (SMP) grants, including Consumers, SME pillar (such as EEN), European Standardisation, and I3 grants with effect from 1 January 2022. The legal basis

is **Commission Decision C(2021)35**, as amended by [Commission Decision C\(2024\)5405](#), as well as the applicable Grant Agreement. Unit costs are defined in those Commission Decisions and set out in **Annex 2a** of the applicable Grant Agreement.

You do not need to show the travel relate documents at reporting stage, but please keep them in your files in case of an audit, which can take place at any moment and up until 5 years after the final payment for your project.

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, must unit costs also be used for travel relate costs of 3rd parties contributing to my project?

Yes, unit costs as explained in [Commission Decision C\(2024\)5405](#) also apply to 3rd party stakeholders. These can be for example 3rd party SMEs or quadruple helix stakeholders.

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, is it possible to subcontract project activities to entities established in Third Countries?

Subcontracting limited parts of the project's actions (no core actions) to entities established in Third Countries outside the EU is possible under the I3 Instrument. The use of subcontractors has to be identified and justified in the proposal (in particular if it exceeds 30% of the total eligible costs). As described in the call for proposals, the selection of the subcontractor need to be documented (for audits) and be based on the lowest price or best value for money and absence of conflict of interest. In addition, the subcontracted activities need to benefit the territories where the project's beneficiaries are established.

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, how should the funded projects interact with the ERDF managing authorities?

The activities of the projects must have a strong link with the smart specialisation strategies of the regions concerned. It is therefore essential to receive the corresponding endorsement letter from the managing authority of each participating region. During project implementation, the cooperation with the managing authorities needs to continue. For example, there are two mandatory closely related deliverables to foresee at application stage and submit at project stage, for which it is crucial to stay in touch with the managing authorities:

- An action plan (for the improvement of the regional innovation ecosystem)
- A report on internal reforms implemented during the project (to be included in the final report)

Section 11 – How to submit an application

Proposal Format and Submission:

May the proposal template be modified for easier completion, such as adjusting table formats?

The template must not be modified

How should a consortium formally confirm the coordinator's mandate to act on behalf of all applicants?

This must be confirmed by ticking a box at the end of the application template, on the EU Funding & Tenders Portal

Can the kick-off and close-out workshops (final event) be organised in locations other than Brussels?

Yes, this is possible. However, organising those meetings in Brussels will facilitate the attendance of the relevant EU project advisers of the Commission and will facilitate the policy feedback exercise.

Past Submissions:

If a similar project was submitted in previous years but has been substantially redesigned, how should this be indicated in the application?

It could be considered as a resubmission

Under I3-2026 CAP2b call, KPIs must be measured at the beginning and at the end of the project. The KPIs tables is expected to include only the regions partner of the consortium or should the project try to reach out more regions, involving them in **project activities?**

There are no specific prescriptions. However, the numbers indicated in the KPIs table is used to measure the expected impact of your project at the beginning of the project and at the concrete impact at end of the project. The number indicated in the table is the target number. You can mention the baseline KPI in the description of the action (main application template) so that a comparison is possible

Under I3-2026-CAP2b call how should statistics in the PART C be presented/ interpreted? Should beneficiaries (full partners) or also associated partners (Q-Helix ecosystem actors) be included?

All persons reached by the activities implemented in the framework of the projects should be considered.

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, what do we do if there are IT issues with the application and specifically with the detailed budget table?

For IT issues regarding your application including on your detailed budget table, please contact the EU Funding & Tenders Portal IT helpdesk:

<https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/support/helpdesks/contact-form>

Regarding the detailed budget table, in case the technical problem does not get solved before submission, please note that the budget table directly entered into the EU Funding & Tenders portal submission tool takes precedence over the detailed budget table (see page 14 of the call document). So, make sure that at least the budget table directly entered into the EU Funding & Tenders portal submission tool is fully accurate.

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, is it possible for one entity to submit more than one project?

Yes, please check section 13 of the call document.

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, must the detailed budget table be submitted in PDF or XLS?

It must be submitted in the format xls,xlsx, or ods.

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, is there a platform for matchmaking if we search partners for this call?

On the EU Funding & Tenders call page there is a [Partner search announcements](#) section.

EISMEA is currently building a dedicated matchmaking platform under the [I3 Support Facility](#). Please check its website regularly before the call deadline.

Section 12 – Help

Technical Upload Issues:

What should be done if there are issues uploading budget tables or other required documents in the Funding & Tenders System?

You can contact the IT Helpdesk according to the guidance provided in the call text (see Section 12 -Help)

Is there guidance available for addressing technical errors in uploaded files?

You can contact the Service desk EC-FUNDING-TENDER-SERVICE-DESK@ec.europa.eu>;

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, which email address should I contact in case of questions?

Before contacting EISMEA or the **EU Funding & Tenders helpdesk**, please consult this Q&A document for example by using a keyword search. If you still do not find an answer, please contact

EISMEA-I3-INSTRUMENT-CALLS@ec.europa.eu for any content related question.

The **IT Helpdesk**: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/support/helpdesks/contact-form> for any IT related question.

The **Online manual**: <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/funding-tenders-opportunities/spaces/OM/pages/1867795/Online+Manual> for any application process related question.

Section 13 - Important

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, can one organisation submit/participate in several proposals, and can the same coordinator participate in different applications?

Yes, applicants (and therefore also regions) may submit more than one proposal for different projects under the same call (and be awarded funding for them). Organisations may participate (also as coordinators) in several proposals. However, if there are several proposals for very similar projects, only one application will be accepted and evaluated. The applicants will be asked to withdraw one of them (or it will be rejected). Moreover, applicants cannot claim costs twice for the same activity implemented in different proposals. Otherwise, this would be double funding. Furthermore, if several proposals are selected, the entity must have the necessary technical and financial resources to carry out the work.

Other questions

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, how many other I3 Instrument projects have been funded so far?

70 projects have been contracted so far. The list and more details are available on the [EU Funding & Tenders Portal](#) and on the [I3 Support Facility Observatory](#). The map of the [I3 Support Facility Observatory](#) is updated every month.

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, will there be other such calls in the future?

This is the last Cap2b call for proposals under this EU Multiannual Funding Programme (MFF).

Under call I3-2026-Cap2b, the financial templates are extremely complex to fill in (in particular for larger consortia) and thus time-consuming. Is the agency considering a simplification to align them on the Horizon Europe model (traditional or lump sums)?

EISMEA is in discussion with central Commission services and DG REGIO. There are no news for the moment.

Under I3-2026-CAP2b, resubmitting a proposal including a new ACRONYM, new partners and addressing shortcomings has to be considered a new proposal or a resubmission?

It should be considered a resubmission.

A. PERSONNEL COSTS (Category A)

How should we estimate and monitor the personnel costs?

1. Monthly declarations / timesheets

Legal basis:

- MGA Art. 6.2.A
- MGA Annex 5 (Audit & controls)

Answer:

Yes, **time records must be kept throughout the whole project duration.**

- Monthly declarations are **not explicitly mandated**, but **regular and contemporaneous time recording is required.**

- The **EC template is not compulsory**.
- Beneficiaries may use **their own timesheet system**, provided it:
 - Is reliable
 - Is approved internally
 - Shows hours worked on the action
 - Is verifiable in case of audit

➔ **In audits, the substance (traceability) matters more than the format.**

2. Evaluation of person-months and WP allocation

Legal basis:

- MGA Art. 6.2
- MGA Art. 20 (Budget flexibility)
- I3 Call text – flexibility principle

Answer:

Evaluation is **not mechanistic**, but **material deviations must be justified**.

- Accepted tolerance:
 - **Personnel costs:** ±30%
 - **All other cost categories:** +30%
- Explanations are required **only for major deviations**, and:
 - At **beneficiary level**
 - Only where deviations materially affect:
 - Work Packages
 - Outputs
 - Project logic

➔ Minor redistributions within this tolerance **do not require justification**.

3. Payroll and proof of payment

Legal basis:

- MGA Art. 6.2.A
- MGA Annex 5

Answer:

Proof of salary payment is required.

- Payroll records **must be available**
- **Salary slips are not mandatory**
- What is required:
 - Employment contract
 - Payroll register
 - Proof of payment (bank transfer)

The auditor must be able to confirm that **salary costs were actually paid**.

3. Day equivalents – annual vs project-based

Legal basis:

- MGA Art. 6.2.A.2

Answer:

Yes, each beneficiary may choose:

- **Annual calculation**, or
- **Whole-project calculation**

Conditions:

- The method must be:
 - Applied **consistently**
 - Aligned with the beneficiary's **usual accounting practices**

Whole-period calculation is **often preferred by EU auditors**, but not mandatory.

5. Daily rate for projects

Legal basis:

- MGA Art. 6.2.A
- Cost-incurrence principle

Answer:

Daily rates must be based on **real costs incurred during the reporting period**.

Therefore:

- Use **actual personnel costs**
- Not only the last closed financial year
- Costs must correspond to **when the work will be performed**

➔ **Future or estimated salaries are not eligible.**

6. Separate reporting lines (person / year / WP)

Legal basis:

- MGA reporting requirements (financial statement structure)

Answer:

This is **best practice and audit safe**.

You should declare:

- One line **per person**
- Split by:
 - **Calendar year**
 - **Work Package**

➔ This is not explicitly mandatory but **strongly recommended** and expected in audits.

7. Reclassification between A.1, A.2, A.3

Legal basis:

- MGA Art. 6.2
- MGA Art. 20 (Budget flexibility)

Answer:

Yes, costs initially planned under:

- **A.1/Employees**
may be declared under:
- **A.2 / A.3 Natural persons**

Conditions:

- Costs remain:
 - Eligible
 - Necessary
 - Linked to the action

- A **clear justification** is provided

☞ No amendment required unless the change alters the nature of the action.

8. Personnel costs reported after period end

Legal basis:

- MGA Art. 6.2
- 13 MGA specific provisions

Answer:

Eligible, provided that:

- Work was performed **during the project period**
- Costs are reported **within 60 days after period end**

☞ Eligibility depends on **when the work was done**, not when it was reported.

C1. TRAVEL & SUBSISTENCE

How should we report travel and subsistence costs?

9. Subsistence unit: nights or days?

Legal basis:

- MGA unit cost rules
- 13 Work Programme references

Answer:

Subsistence units are based on **number of nights**.

10. Multiple short field trips

Legal basis:

- MGA Art. 6.2.C.1

Answer:

Both options are acceptable:

- Separate lines **or**
- Grouped under one item

Conditions for grouping:

- Same purpose
- Same unit rate
- Clear description

11. Travel of external persons

Legal basis:

- MGA Art. 6.2.C.1 vs C.3
- I3 eligibility rules

Answer:

Travel of **external persons** (not beneficiaries or affiliated entities):

- Must be declared under **C.3 Other goods, works and services**
- Declared as **actual costs**
- **Unit rates may still be used as reference**, but category remains C.3

12. Accounting actual costs vs reporting unit costs

Legal basis:

- MGA Art. 6.2.C.1

Answer:

- Accounting system: **actual invoices**
- Project reporting: **unit costs**

Choice of unit cost table:

- May be made **per beneficiary**
- Must be **applied consistently**
- No amendment required for updated rates
- **Justification is sufficient**

13. Audit of unit travel costs (CFS)

Legal basis:

- MGA Annex 5 – Agreed-Upon Procedures

Answer:

When unit costs apply:

- Actual-cost procedures are **not applicable**
- Auditor verifies:
 - Eligibility of travel
 - Correct application of unit rates
 - Compliance with national/company rules

Supporting evidence still required:

- Mission purpose
- Dates
- Participants

14. Grouping identical trips

Answer:

Yes.

Example:

- 10 identical company visits
- Same rate and description
 Declare **1 travel type with 10 units**

15. Difference between DoA estimates and actual unit costs

Legal basis:

- MGA Art. 20

Answer:

The **actual trips carried out** are decisive.

- DoA amounts are **estimates**
- Final declared costs prevail
- Deviations are acceptable
- Early booking is recommended but not mandatory

C2. EQUIPMENT

16. Software classification

Legal basis:

- MGA Art. 6.2.C.2 & C.3
- National accounting rules

Answer:

Depends on the beneficiary's accounting treatment:

- If software is an **amortizable asset** → **C.2 Equipment**
- If not → **C.3 Other goods, works and services**

☞ Must be consistent with national accounting rules.

C3. OTHER GOODS, WORKS & SERVICES

How should we budget other goods, works and services?

17. Grouping purchases

Legal basis:

- MGA Art. 6.2.C.3

Answer:

Yes, multiple small purchases may be grouped.

Conditions:

- Same nature
- Clear explanation
- Traceable documentation

CERTIFICATE ON FINANCIAL STATEMENTS (CFS)

How should we budget costs for CFS?

18. € 325,000 threshold

Legal basis:

- MGA Art. 24
- I3 MGA

Answer:

The threshold applies to **total direct eligible costs**, not only actual costs.

Artificially staying below the threshold:

- Is **legally sensitive**
- Not recommended
- Should be discussed with the **Project Officer**

1. **Auditor selection**

Legal basis:

- MGA Annex 5

Answer:

Auditor must be:

- External
- Independent
- Officially accredited

Procurement rules:

- Follow beneficiary's **national rules**