European Innovation Council

Info Day in Nicosia, Cyprus

18 February 2026

RESEARCH & INNOVATION FOUNDATION

European Innovation Council

European Innovation Council

SESSION
EIC for deep tech researchers

Master of Ceremony

Agnieszka Chlad

Communication Advisor, European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency

European Innovation Council

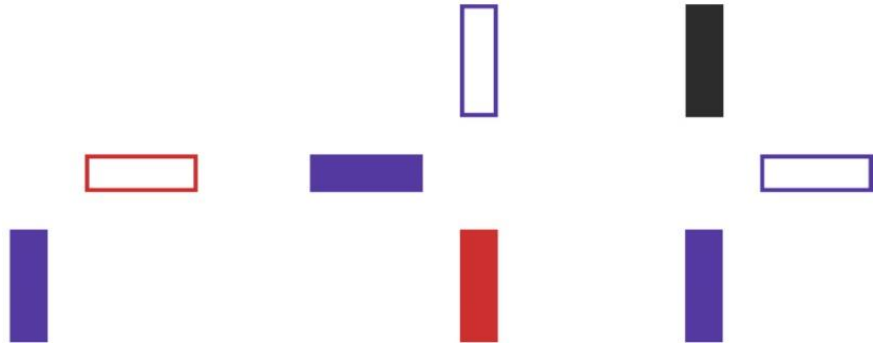
The European Innovation Council: support for researchers

Timo Hallantie

Head of EIC Pathfinder Unit, European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency

European Innovation Council

1. What is the EIC Pathfinder?
2. Statistics from 2021-2025 Pathfinder calls
3. 2026 EIC Pathfinder Open call & its main novelties
4. 2026 EIC Pathfinder Challenges call & its main novelties
5. Calls summary table



1 What is the EIC Pathfinder?

What is the EIC Pathfinder?

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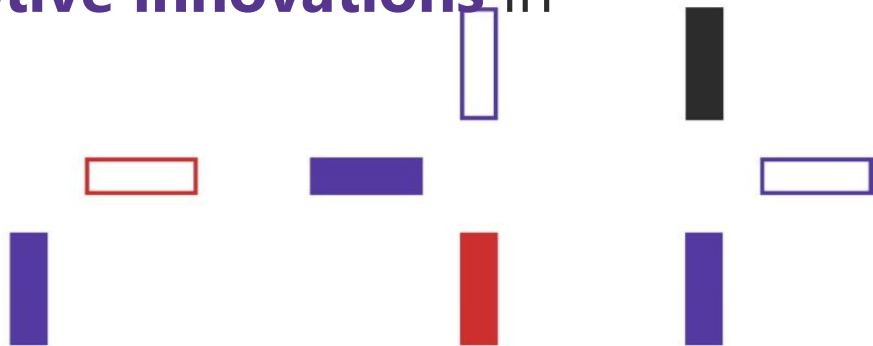
- funds **research** to develop the **scientific basis** to underpin breakthrough technologies
- supports the **earliest stages** of scientific, technological or deep-tech R&D
- aims to build on new, **cutting-edge directions in science & technology** to disrupt a field and a market or create new opportunities
- realises innovative technological solutions to identify, develop and scale up **breakthrough technologies** and **disruptive innovations** in Europe



Funding schemes

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EIC Pathfinder Open

to support projects in any field of science, technology or application without predefined thematic priorities ('bottom-up')

EIC Pathfinder Challenges

to support coherent portfolios of projects within predefined thematic areas with the aim to achieve specific objectives for each Challenge

2 Statistics from 2021-2025 Pathfinder calls

Call statistics EIC Pathfinder 2021-2025

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Open	eligible proposals	funded proposals	EU contribution	success rate
2021	868	60	183.1 M€	6,9%
2022	858	66	206.5 M€	7,7%
2023	783	62	186.9 M€	7,9%
2024	1110	45	137.3 M €	4,1%
2025	2069	44	140.7 M €	2,1%
Total	**5688**	**277**	**854,5 M €**	**4,9%**

Challenges	eligible proposals	funded proposals	EU contribution	success rate
2021	403	42	146.9 M€	10,4%
2022	436	49	182.7 M€	11,2%
2023	365	46	168.2M€	12,3%
2024	401	32	119,6 M€	8,0%
2025	677 in evaluation	*est. 30*	*indicative 120 M€*	*est 4.4%*
Total	**1605**	**169**	**617.4M€**	**10,5%**

3

2026 EIC Pathfinder Open call & its main novelties

Why apply?

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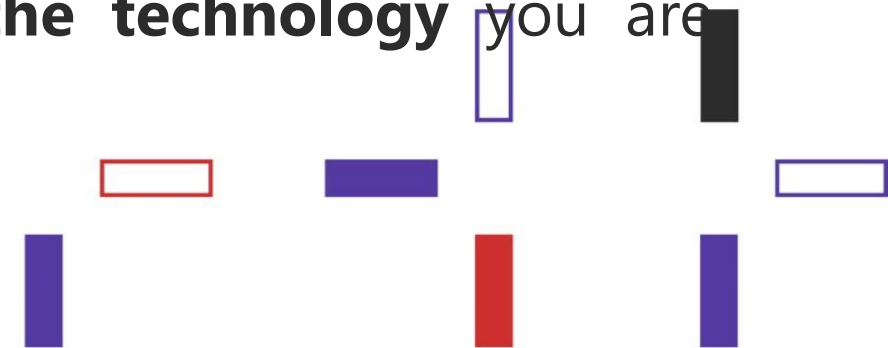
- Realise **an ambitious vision for radically new technology**, with potential to create new markets and/or to address global challenges.
- Support for **early-stage development of such future technologies** (e.g., various activities at low **Technology Readiness Levels from 1 to 4**), based on high-risk/high-gain science-towards-technology breakthrough research (including 'deep-tech').
- This research must provide the **foundations of the technology** you are envisioning.



EIC Pathfinder Open: Gatekeepers

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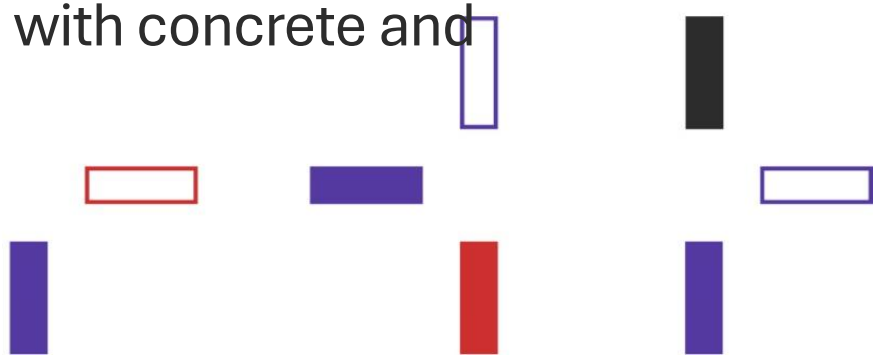
Collaborative, **interdisciplinary research**, meeting the following criteria:

- **convincing, long-term vision of a radically new technology** that has the potential to have a transformative positive effect to our economy and society;
- **concrete, novel and ambitious science-towards-technology breakthrough**, providing advancement towards the envisioned technology;
- **high-risk & high-gain research approach & methodology**, with concrete and plausible objectives.



Expected output | Open projects

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- **Proof of principle** that the **main ideas of the envisioned future technology are feasible**, thus validating its scientific and technological basis
- Project results should include **top-level scientific publications** in open access
- Projects are expected to take the necessary measures to **allow future uptake to take place**, for instance through an **adequate formal protection of the generated Intellectual Property (IP)** and **an assessment of relevant aspects related to regulation, certification, and standardization.**
- Projects are encouraged to involve and empower in their teams **key actors** that have the potential to **become future leaders** in their field such as excellent early-career researchers or promising high-tech SMEs, including start-ups
- Project are also encouraged to **empower female researchers** and to achieve gender balance among the work package leaders

Consortium composition | Open projects

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- Proposals must be **submitted by the coordinator,** on behalf of a consortium including as beneficiaries at least three legal entities, independent from each other and each established in a different country as follows:
  - at least one legal entity established in a Member State; and
  - at least two other independent legal entities, each established in different Member States or Associated Countries.
- The legal entities may for example be universities, research organisations, SMEs, start-ups, industrial partners or natural persons.

Support Upon Proposal Funding

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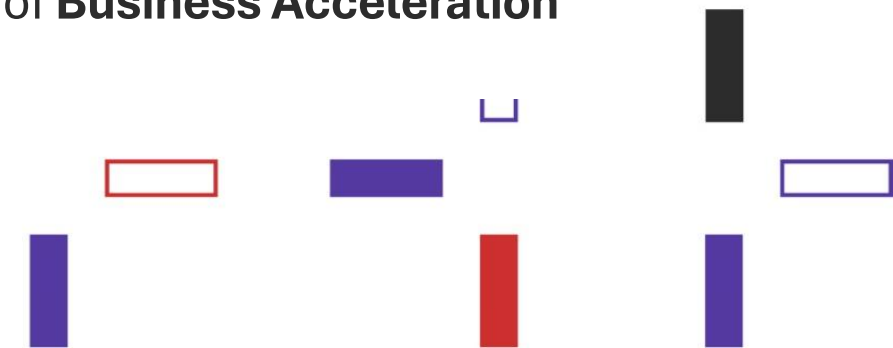
- You will receive a grant for a **Research and Innovation Action** to cover the **eligible costs**, necessary for the implementation of your project.
- For this call, the EIC considers proposals with a requested EU contribution of **up to EUR 4 million** as appropriate. Nonetheless, this does not preclude you to request larger amounts, if properly justified.
- The funding rate of this grant will be 100% of the eligible costs (lump sum)
- The total indicative budget for this call is EUR **166 million**.
- Successful applicants will receive tailor-made access to a wide range of **Business Acceleration Services** and interactions with **EIC Programme Managers**



How long does it take?

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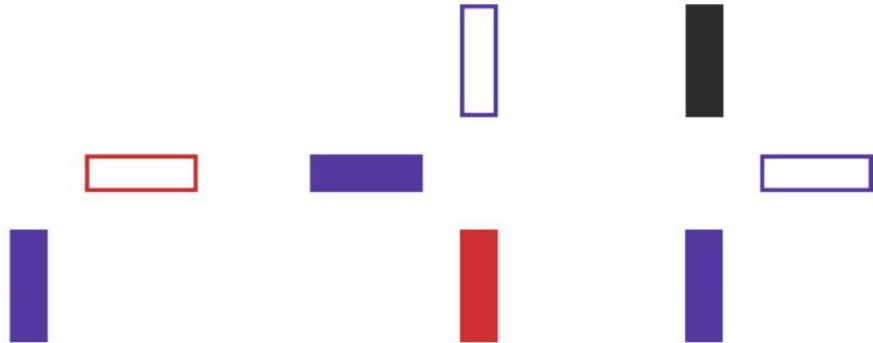
- You must submit your application via the **Funding and Tender Opportunities Portal** before the given deadline.
- You will be informed about the outcome of the evaluation within **5 months from the call deadline** (indicative).
- If your proposal is selected for funding, you can expect your **grant agreement to be signed by 8 months after the call deadline**.
- The deadline to submit the proposal is **12 May 2026 at 17.00 CEST**.



Proposal Application Form

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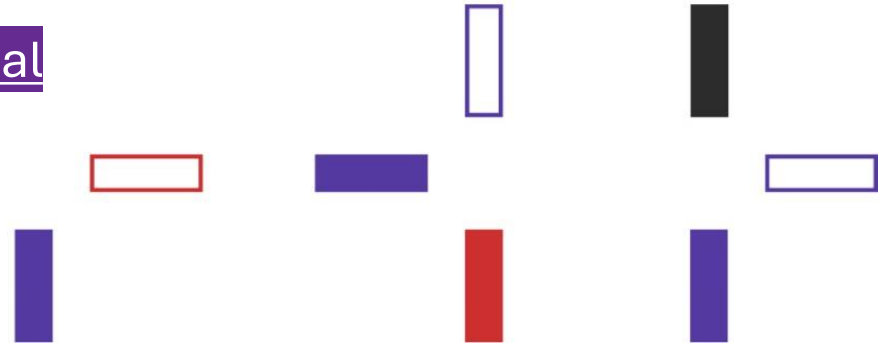
- **Part A**
  - to be filled in online (no page limit), contains: administrative details, the summarised budget and call specific questions

- The **estimated budget** must be described in a **detailed budget table**. This will be used as a basis for justifying and/or fixing the **lump sum amount**.

- **Part B:**
  - to be uploaded as a single document (page limit: max. **22** A4 pages - Section 1 to 3)
  - contains: the technical description of the project.

Template available on the Funding and Tender Opportunities Portal



How is proposal funding determined?

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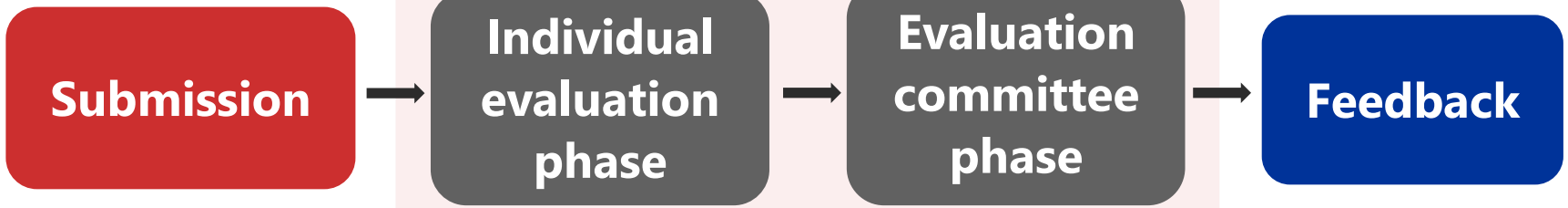

Evaluation procedure by independent experts

Individual evaluation phase

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- At least three EIC expert evaluators evaluate and score the proposals individually based on the **award criteria**:
  - ❖ **Excellence**
  - ❖ **Impact**
  - ❖ **Quality and efficiency of the implementation**
- The **score** for each evaluation criterion will be the **average of the evaluators' scores** per criterion.
- The **overall score from this individual evaluation phase** will be the **weighted sum** of the three average scores from the three award criteria.

Ranking list – Equal score resolution

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Proposals with the same scoring will be untied based on the following factors, *in order*:

- higher score under the criterion Excellence
- higher score under the criterion Impact
- gender balance among the work package leaders as identified in the proposal
- number of applicants that are SMEs
- number of Member States and Associated Countries represented in the consortium
- if needed, other factors determined by the evaluation committee.

2026 EIC Pathfinder Challenges call

EIC Pathfinder Challenges - introduction

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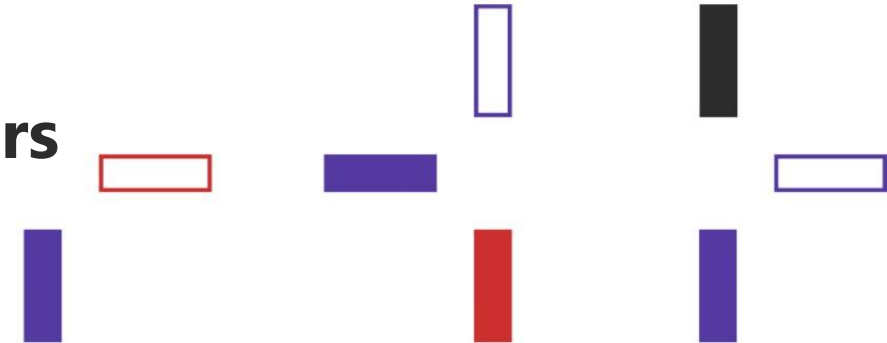
- Build on **new, cutting-edge directions in science and technology**;
- Disrupt a market or create new opportunities **by realising innovative technological solutions** grounded in high-risk/high-gain research and development;
- Establish **a portfolio of projects** for each Challenge that explore different perspectives, competing approaches or complementary aspects;
- Proactively steered by **EIC Programme Managers**



Expected project outcomes

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- Expected outcomes defined in the respective Challenge
- Project results should include **top-level scientific publications** as well as an **adequate formal protection of the generated Intellectual Property as well as an assessment of relevant aspects related to regulation, certification, and standardization**;
- Projects are encouraged to involve and empower within their teams **key actors** that have the potential to **become future leaders** in their fields such as excellent early-career researchers or promising high-tech SMEs, including start-ups;
- Project particularly encouraged to **empower female researchers** and achieve **gender balance** among the work package leaders.

Pathfinder Challenge Guides

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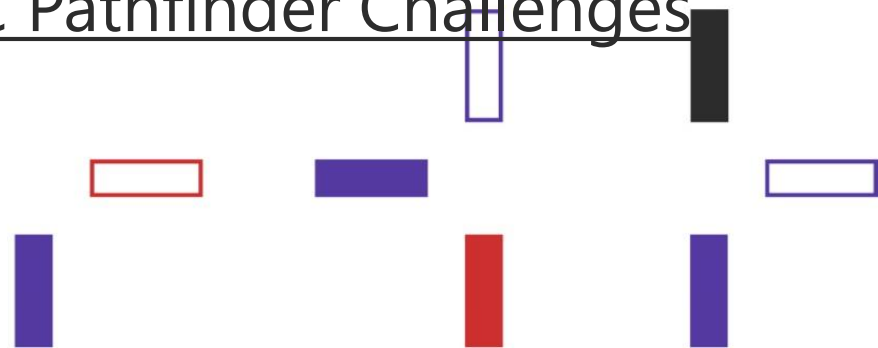
- **Challenge Guides** will provide more information about:
  - **Objectives** of the Challenges
  - **Technical information** underpinning the objectives
  - **Portfolio considerations** used for the final selection of proposals to be funded
- Challenge Guides are already published on the EIC Pathfinder Challenges page



EIC Pathfinder challenges 2026

European Innovation Council

PATHFINDER CHALLENGES

Advanced Materials for Miniaturised Energy Harvesting Systems	€ 32 million
Biotechnology for Healthy Aging	€ 32 million
DeepRAP: Deep Reasoning, Abstraction & Planning towards trustworthy Cognitive AI Systems	€ 32 million
Indicative call budget	**€ 96 million**

Info day on Pathfinder Challenges with Programme Managers on 30 March 2026 (tbc)

Can you apply? (1)

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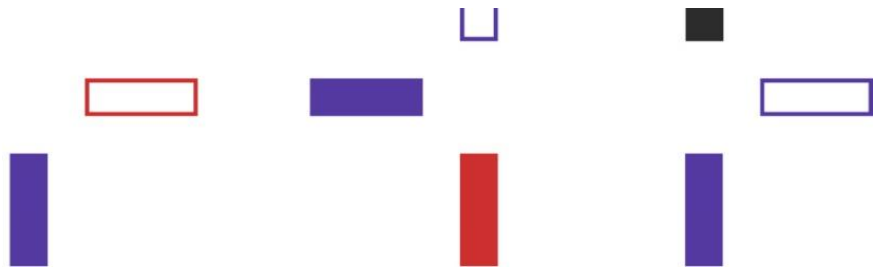
- **Single legal entities** established in a Member State or an Associated Country (mid-caps and larger companies will not be permitted)
- **Consortia of two entities** must be two independent legal entities from two different Member States or Associated Countries
- **Consortia of three or more entities** must include as beneficiaries at least three legal entities, independent from each other and each established in a different country as follows:
  - at least one legal entity established in a Member State; and
  - at least two other independent legal entities, each established in different Member States or Associated Countries.
- The legal entities may for example be universities, research organisations, SMEs, start-ups, industrial partners or natural persons.



Can you apply? (2)

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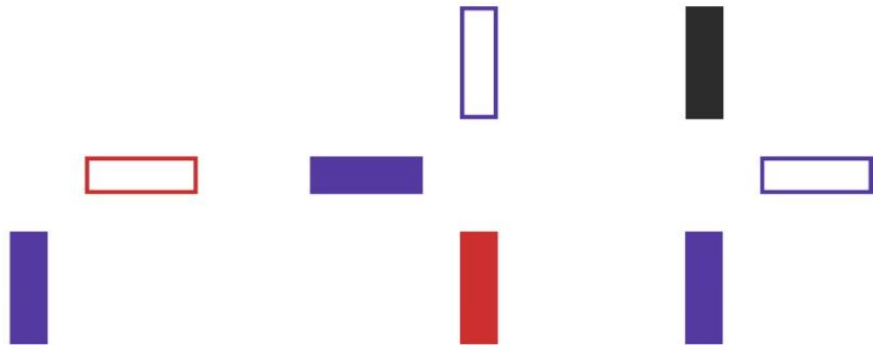
- **Important: associated partners** are not considered for eligibility rules!
- Examples of **ineligible** consortia:
  - 2 organisations from FR & 1 organisation from DE
  - 2 organisations from PL & 2 organisations from IT
  - 2 organisations from FR, 1 organisation from DE & 1 organisation from Canada
- Examples of **eligible** consortia:
  - 1 organisation from MT & 1 organisation from CZ
  - 1 organisation from ES & 1 organisation from Australia
  - 1 organisation from EL,1 organisation from SE & 1 organisation from the United States

What support will you receive if your proposal is funded? (1)

European Innovation Council

- A **grant** for a **Research and Innovation Action** to cover eligible costs
- EIC considers proposals with an EU contribution of **up to € 4 million** as appropriate (larger amounts possible, if duly justified)
- Total indicative budget for this call: **€ 96 million** (expected to be allocated in approximately equal shares across the Challenges)
- Successful applicants will receive tailor-made access to a wide range of **Business Acceleration Services** and interactions with **EIC Programme Managers** and other actions in the portfolio of projects selected



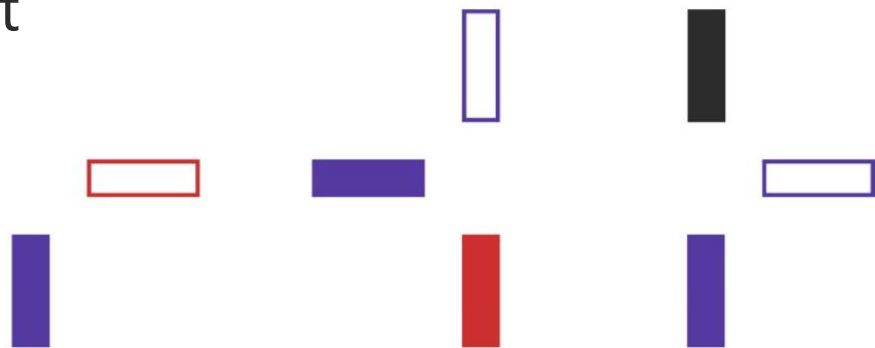
What support will you receive if your proposal is funded? (2)

- Funding rate **100% of the eligible costs**

- Eligible costs will take the form of a **lump sum** and **the amount will be determined during the evaluation process**.

- Applicants must **propose the amount of the lump sum** based on their estimated project costs

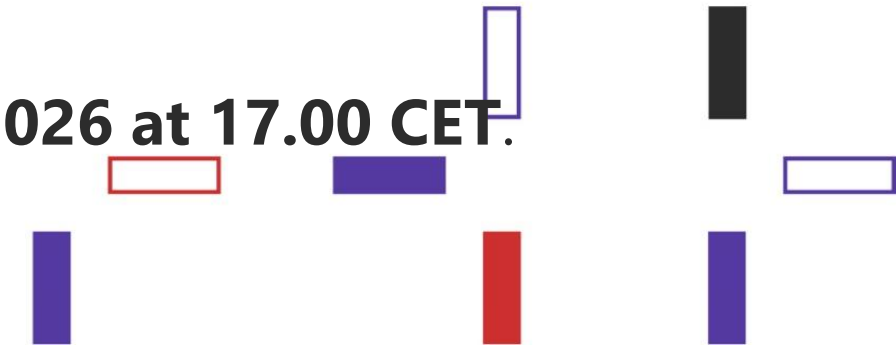
- It is advised to include a **work package** dedicated to **portfolio activities** and allocate at least 10 person-month to it



How to apply: how long does it take?

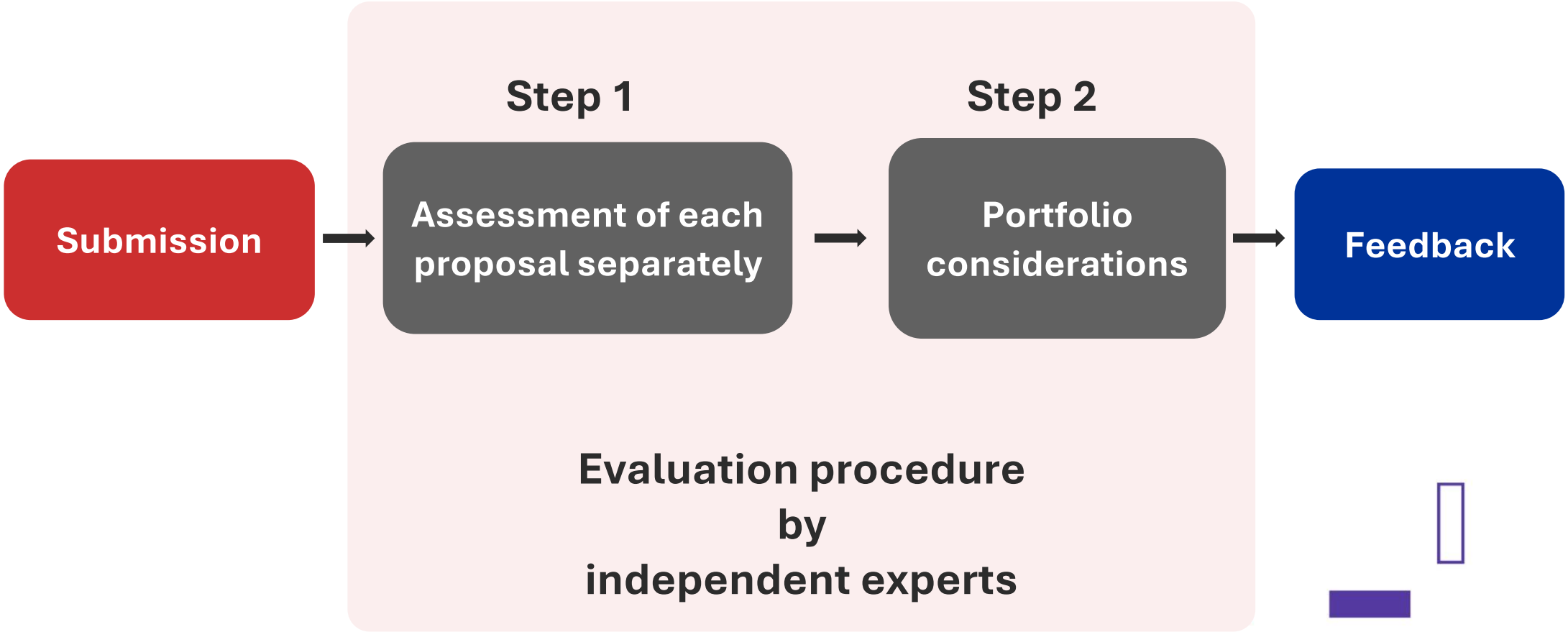
European Innovation Council

- You must submit your application via the **Funding and Tender Opportunities Portal** before the given deadline.
- You will be informed about the outcome of the evaluation within **5 months from the call deadline** (indicative).
- If your proposal is selected for funding, you can expect your **grant agreement to be signed by 8 months after the call deadline**.
- The call will open on 28 July 2026.
- The deadline to submit the proposal is **28 October 2026 at 17.00 CET**.



How is proposal funding determined?

European Innovation Council



Step 1: Assessment of each proposal separately

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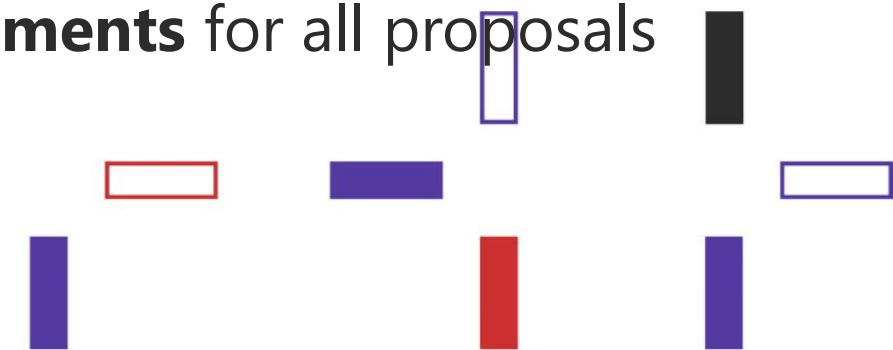
- At least three EIC expert evaluators evaluate and score **each proposal individually** with respect to the award criteria
- After the individual evaluation, these evaluators will get together in a **consensus group** to agree on a common position on comments and scores.
- The **evaluation committee** (composed of EIC expert evaluators and EIC Programme Managers) will check consistency across the evaluation of each individual proposal and **finalise the scores and comments** for all proposals



Step 2: Portfolio considerations

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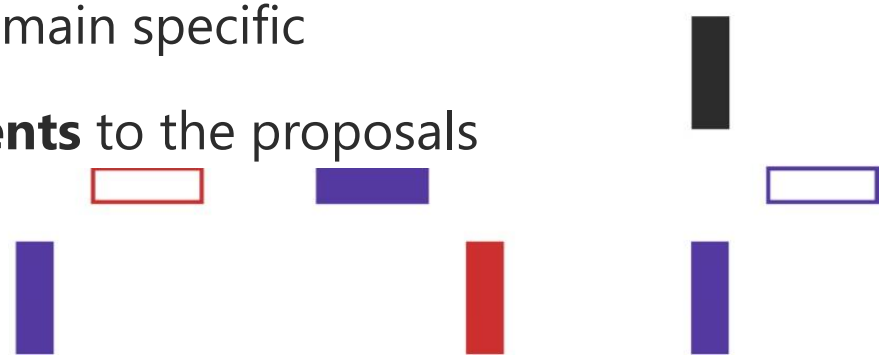
- All proposals that meet the thresholds defined in the award criteria will be considered in step 2
- **Mapping of proposals in categories** stemming from overall goal and specific objectives of the Challenge (e.g., building blocks or subsystems, technical areas and/or competing technologies, platforms, applications areas, risk level and stage of technology readiness level, size)
- A **suitable portfolio of proposals** to be selected by evaluation committee by applying **portfolio considerations** in order to propose for funding a coherent set of projects that will achieve expected outcomes and impacts of the Challenge and maximise their impact.
- Further information and details about categories and portfolio considerations to be detailed in **EIC Pathfinder Challenge Guides**, which will be topic and domain specific
- Evaluation committee may also **propose some minor adjustments** to the proposals



Feedback to Applicants

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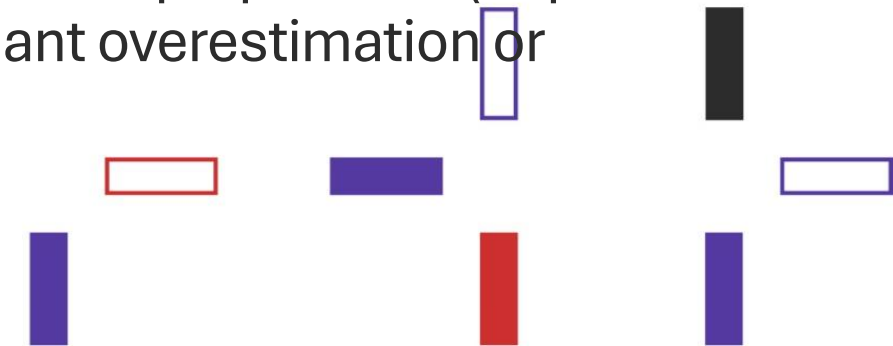
- Applicants will receive an **Evaluation Summary Report** that will comprise of:
  - the **final score;**
  - **comments endorsed** by the evaluation committee;
  - **additional comments.**
- Applicants will also be informed about the **underlying portfolio considerations** in case their proposal was either retained for funding or not retained for funding while it received a score that was higher than other proposals retained for funding under the same Challenge.
- Comments on the detailed lump sum budget table will be provided in the Evaluation Summary Report only for proposals invited to grant agreement preparation (or placed in the reserve list) and ones rejected (in part) due to significant overestimation or underestimation of costs.



What happens after a proposal is evaluated and retained for funding?

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- Successful applicants will be contacted and supported by **Project Officer** and relevant **EIC Programme Manager** during grant preparation
- Planning of **portfolio activities** - all projects in the Challenge Portfolio are expected to collaborate with each other
- Start of preparation of **Challenge roadmap**, which will define collective deliverables, activities and objectives of the portfolio of projects
- During the execution of the project: **continuous interaction** with Project Officer assigned to your project and the EIC Programme Manager assigned to the Challenge Portfolio of your project, who will oversee all the portfolio projects

Additional Opportunities for Pathfinder Selected Projects:

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Projects funded through EIC Pathfinder are eligible to:

- receive **EIC Booster grants** (up to 3 per project or more if duly justified) of a fixed amount not exceeding EUR 50 000 to undertake complementary activities:
  - to explore potential pathways to commercialisation
  - for portfolio activities
- submit an **EIC Transition** proposal
- submit an **EIC Accelerator** proposal via the **Fast Track** scheme
- participate in '**Next Generation Innovation Talents**' scheme (personnel costs of participating researchers are eligible under Pathfinder grants)

5

Pathfinder Summary table

Pathfinder calls 2026 – Summary table

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	Pathfinder Open	Pathfinder Challenges
Total budget	**€166 million**	**€96 million**
Proposals (indicative)	Up to €4 million or more if justified	
Funding rate	100% of eligible costs, lump sums	
Opening	5 February 2026	28 July 2026
Deadline	12 May 2026 at 17.00 CEST	28 October 2026 at 17.00 CET
Length of proposal	22-page proposal (part B)	30-page proposal (part B)
Applicants	**Consortia:** min. 3 partners from 3 different Member States /Associated Countries of which at least 1 partner in a Member State	**Consortia:** • If 2 partners: from different MS/AC, • If 3+ partners: from min 3 different MS/AC of which at least 1 partner in a MS **Single legal entities** in a MS/AC

Q&A Session

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European Innovation Council

Exploring technology transfer strategies and best practices

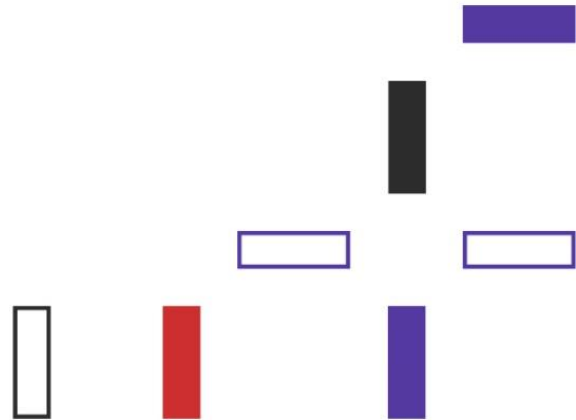
*Session moderated by **Angelo Wille**, Deputy Head of EIC Unit, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, European Commission*

Theodoros Loukaidis
Director General of the Cyprus Research & Innovation Foundation (RIF)

Timo Hallantie
Head of EIC Pathfinder Unit, European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency

Constantinos Loizou
CEO & Founder, Embio Diagnostics Ltd

Maria-Andrea R. Anastasi
Project Manager/MSc Forensic Medicine at Mimar project, EIC Transition Awardee



Q&A Session

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EIC awardee experience

Vasileios Vavourakis

Associate Professor at the University of Cyprus, Principal Investigator of IgnitePLASMA | Partner in SoftReach, EIC Pathfinder Awardee

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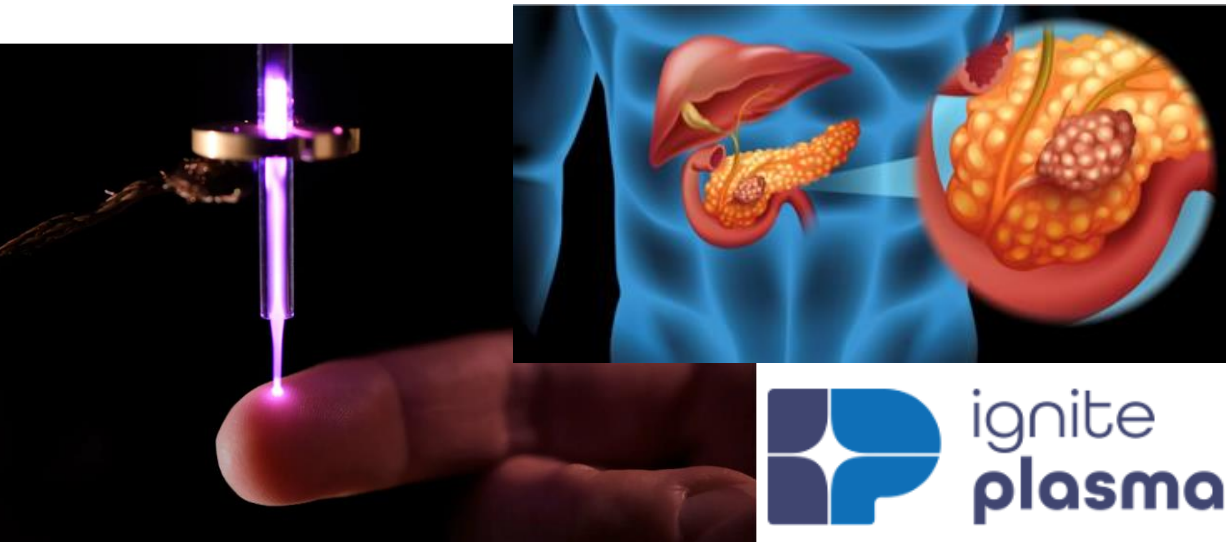
IgnitePLASMA & SoftReach

- R&D on a technologically advanced, computer-aided platform of minimally invasive pancreatic cancer treatment based on cold atmospheric plasma

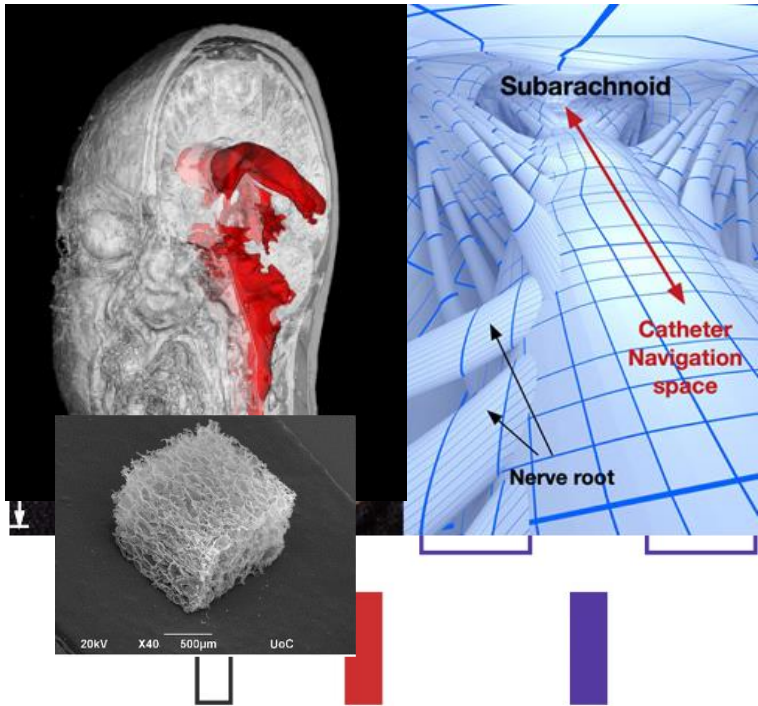
https://igniteplasma.eu/



ignite plasma

- R&D on robotics, imaging, modelling and biomaterials for the targeted delivery of therapeutics against neurological disorders (AD)

https://softreach.eu/



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Before even starting on your grant application

- Get to know your partners very well
  - capacity for R&D, running EU projects
  - ideally meet in person at least once
- Discuss (through many iterations) about the new tech and work-plan
- Actively engage with your partners while preparing the grant
  - study very well the proposal template (including EIC material)
- Transparency on background technology / potential conflicts
- Prepare (very) well in advance of the deadline

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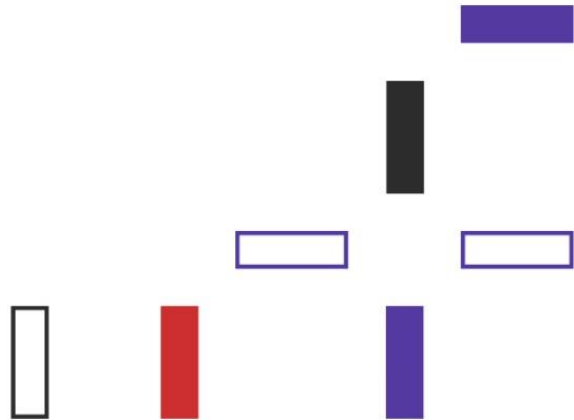
Key aspects about a successful grant

- Excellence
  - clearly address current limitations in the field – do you move beyond SotA?
  - multidisciplinary approach, strong scientific consortium
  - propose an innovative strategy while project feasibility should be convincing
  - sufficient details about the methodology
  - underline rationale behind the selected R&D strategies
- Impact
  - applicability of tech to other aspects
  - translation potential ?
  - impact on economy should be straightforward
  - demonstrate clearly current & expected TRL
  - prospects to generate advanced tech and new market
- Implementation
  - organize very well WPs & Tasks
  - careful on Milestones and Deliverables
  - detailed risk analysis and mitigation plan
  - quality of the Consortium *wrt* the project objectives should be convincing
  - dependence of specific tasks across different WPs and interlink amongst partners -> impact on feasibility



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EIC awardee experience

Maria-Andrea R. Anastasi

Project Manager/MSc Forensic Medicine at MIMIR project (Miniaturized MEMS-based spectrometers for the Mid-Infrared spectral region), EIC Transition Awardee

What is MIMIR ?

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The world smallest FTIR spectrometer measurement system operating in Mid-IR

Specialized spectral analyzers for:

a) Kidney diseases monitoring

b) Soil quality assessment

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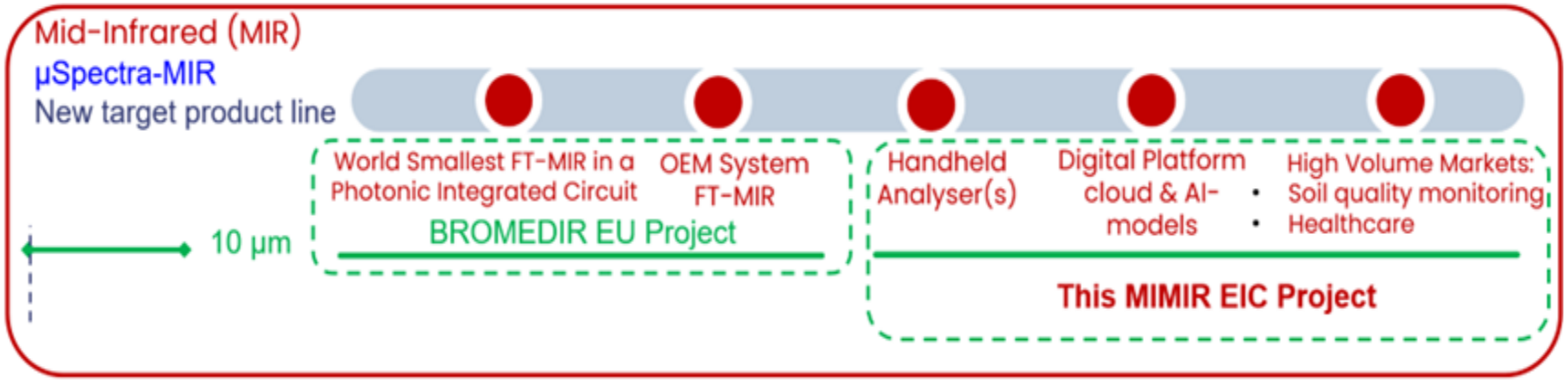
Road to the MIMIR success



MIMIR

Smaller, broader, cheaper, more robust – and fully supported with calibration models!

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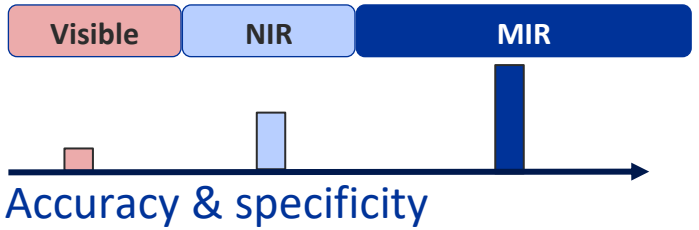
MIMIR: From Lab (TRL 4) to Pre-industrial prototype (TRL 6)

- **World smallest FTIR spectrometer** measurement system operating in MIR
- Extended spectral range up to **10 µm**
- **MEMS-based**
- Fabrication cost <900€
- **MIR Digital Platform**

Gemini™ Chemical Identification Analyzers, Thermo-Fischer Scientific

4300 Handheld FTIR Spectrometer, Agilent



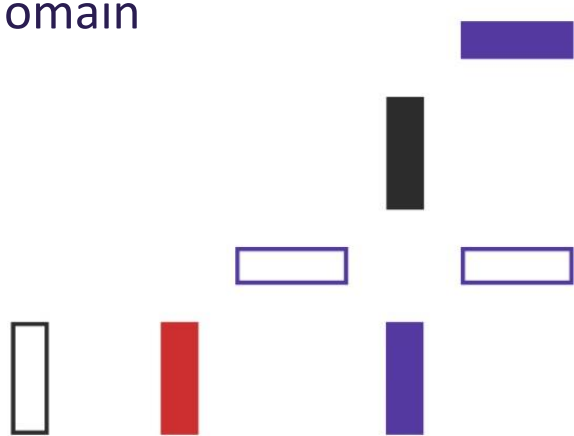
Was it easy?

Well…

- For us, the idea was clear and the plan straight forward 😔
- The main technology development team was there and we added two use case owners
- Formulated a strong proposal that we submitted in the 2024 deadline
- …we only reached the Pitch stage

As a team, we would have pursuit with the idea anyway, but without EIC support, it would take more time

- So, we decided to resubmit in the 2025 deadline
- The concept was the same, but we: a) put more focus on technology robustification, instead of further enhancement of specs, b) added one more exploitation partner for the medical domain
- This time…success ☺️



Q&A Session

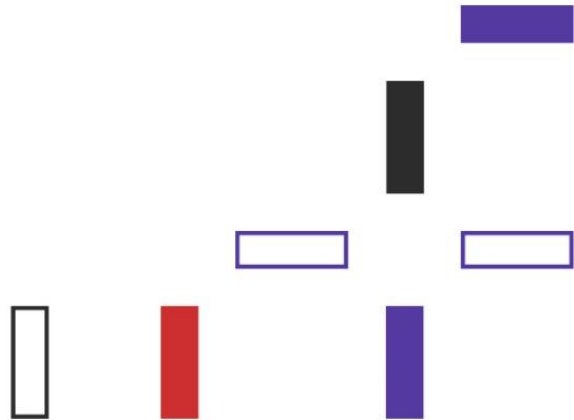
European Innovation Council

European Innovation Council

Local support for EIC applicants

Antonis Ioulianos

Scientific Officer A', National Contact Point Coordinator, Research and Innovation Foundation Cyprus



ESTABLISHED IN 1996

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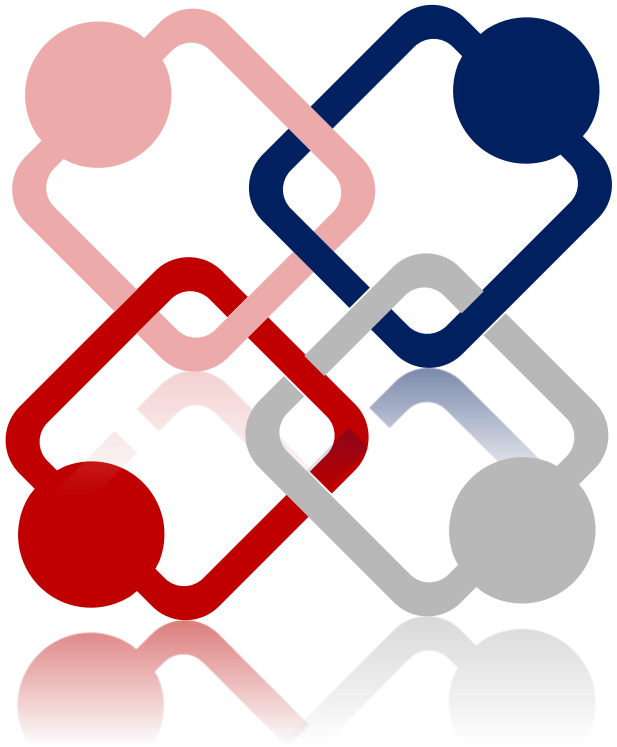
Who we are

Research & Innovation Foundation

The national authority in charge of supporting and promoting research, technological development and innovation in Cyprus

National Funding Programmes

Support for CY participation in the EU's Framework Programmes



Central Knowledge Transfer Office (CKTO)

Innovation Services & Capacity Building

European Innovation Council

What we are trying to achieve

European Innovation Council

Funding delivered through 5 Strategic Pillars

Internationalisation Pillar
to support global reach

Research Pillar
early-stage research that fosters new knowledge & innovation potential

Cooperation & Knowledge Transfer Pillar
connecting businesses with academia, enabling transfer of knowledge

Innovation Pillar
for startups & businesses developing innovative products or services

Enhancing Infrastructures & Skills Pillar
to support talent and capacity building

To the market

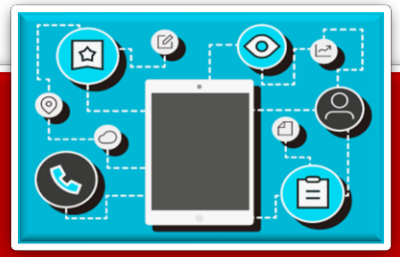
RESEARCH & INNOVATION FOUNDATION

European Innovation Council

Research and Innovation Foundation

NCP Services / Coordinator

- ✓ Dedicated website
- ✓ Info-days
- ✓ Webinars
- ✓ Training workshops
- ✓ Direct communication
- ✓ Mailing lists
- ✓ Social media



- ✓ Proposal support
- ✓ Proposal pre-screenings
- ✓ Partner search
- ✓ Resolving queries
- ✓ Mock interviews
- ✓ ERC Mentoring Initiative
- ✓ ERC Fellowship Initiative

- ✓ Legal & Financial issues
- ✓ Consortium Agreement
- ✓ Grant Agreement
- ✓ IPR in HE programmes
- ✓ Project Management

Awareness raising & Information dissemination	Proposal preparation support	Project implementation support

Contact us: 22205000 / support@research.org.cy / Join our Mailing List

RESEARCH & INNOVATION FOUNDATION

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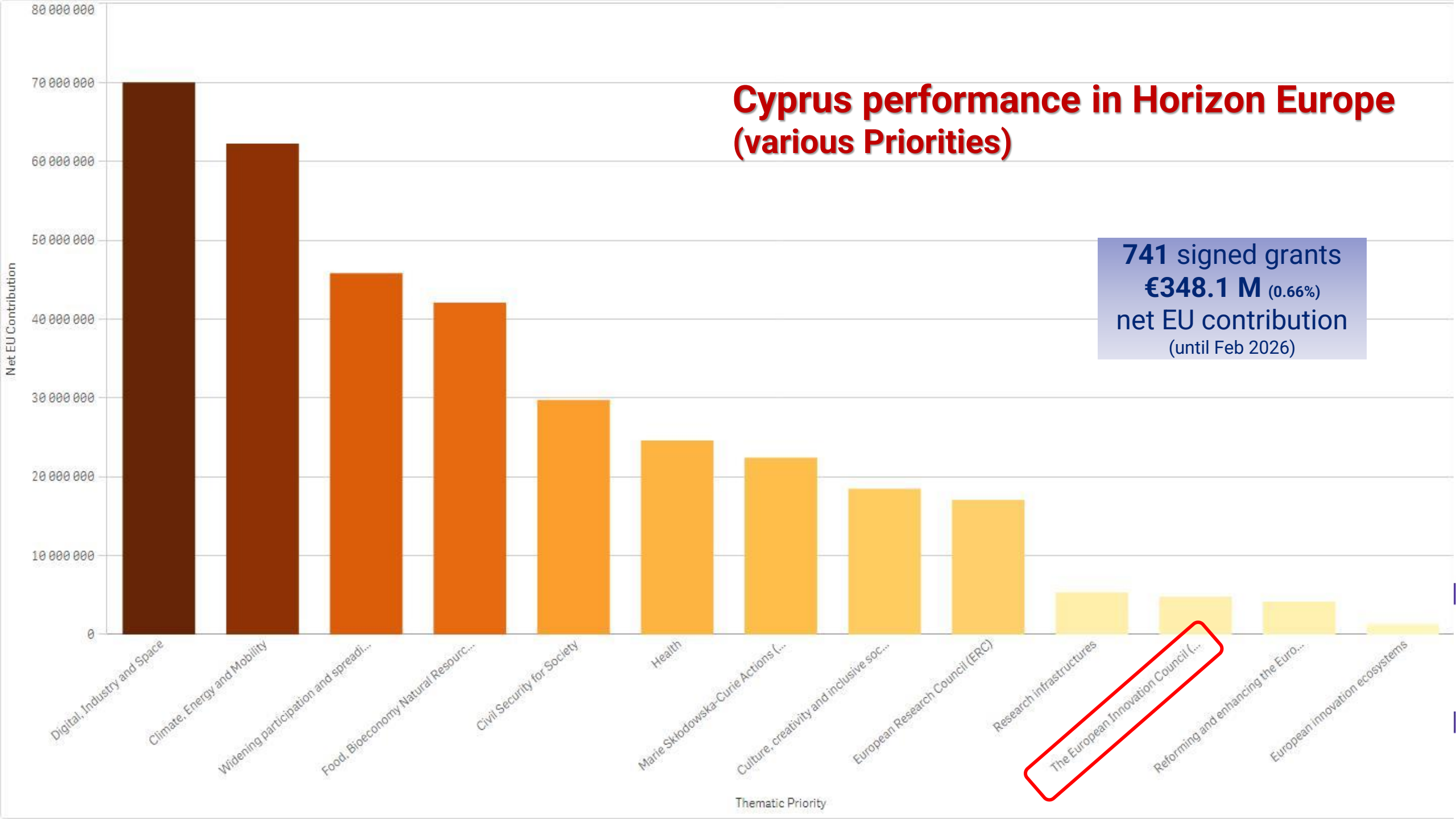
Cyprus performance in Horizon Europe (various Priorities)



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Thank you!

Research and Innovation Foundation (RIF)

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Q&A Session

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Networking Cocktail Reception

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