

An abstract graphic on the left side of the page consists of a complex network of green lines and dots, resembling a circuit board or a molecular structure, with a larger cluster on the left and a smaller, more compact cluster on the right.

Open Call 2 Applicants' Guide 11/12/2025



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1. Introduction

This document provides guidance information regarding the INCiTIS-FOOD Open Call, including the eligibility and evaluation criteria. The document in its entirety and all associated Annexes must be read carefully for the submission of an application.

1.1. About INCiTIS-FOOD Project



With current African cities experiencing a growth in population with an increase in consumption of protein-rich food, the Integrated and Circular Technologies for Sustainable city region FOOD systems in Africa (INCiTIS-FOOD) project hopes to create a system with novel practices to ensure a stable food future for Africa.

Additionally, African urbanization is at 50%, with many net food buyers increasing their consumption of animal sourced food, fruits and veggies. Yet undernourishment and malnutrition persist due to lack of protein, micronutrients, and vitamin A. Fish account for up to 50% of protein intake in some countries but is still below global levels and insects are already common in African diets. The African food system needs to change at its core. INCiTIS-FOOD focuses on sustainable agri-food practices and addresses the pressing challenges of food and nutritional security, environmental pressures of food production and environmental justice in the African region.

INCiTIS-FOOD aims at revolutionizing African city region food systems by enhance food and nutrition security (FNS) across four core dimensions – availability, access, utilization, and stability through solutions centered around soilless crop farming, recirculating aquaculture systems, and insect farming. These circular agri-food technologies have been considered suitable for the context of African cities because they do not require great access to land, water, or other resources allowing Africa to thrive.

Through co-creation of cutting-edge circular agri-food technologies, practices, and business models, INCiTIS-FOOD is creating an inclusive food system that is both sustainable and accessible. With 8 living labs across 6 countries and a user-centric approach, INCiTIS-FOOD is applying a Lean Start-up Methodology to launch innovative technologies, services, practices, and products – empowering stakeholders to shape the future of food in Africa.

INCiTIS-FOOD strives to positively impact food and nutritional security through EU-AU partnerships in Africa by utilizing **hydroponics**, **recirculating aquaculture**, **aquaponics** and **insect farming** and fostering collaboration among all relevant stakeholders along the supply and value chain, including women and young adults, start-ups, and small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

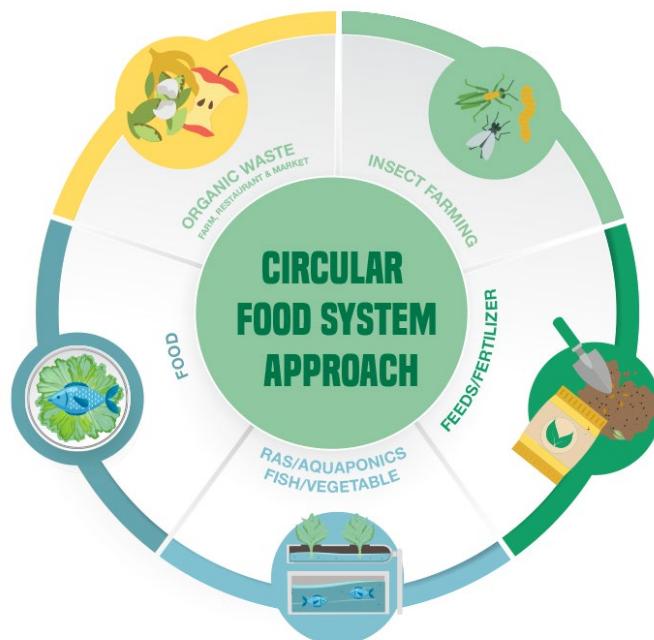


Figure 1 INCiTIS-FOOD at a glance

Hydroponics	A technique for soil independent cultivation of plants, utilizing a nutrient-rich water solution to provide essential elements for plant growth. The method can be
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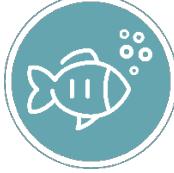
	implemented horizontally or vertically and in various set-ups, such as nutrient film technique (NFT) and deep water culture (DWC). The benefits of this approach include efficient water usage, accelerated growth rates, increased yields, and the ability to cultivate plants in areas with limited space, water resources, or poor soil quality.
Aquaponics 	A farming technique that integrates aquaculture (fish farming) and hydroponics, creating a closed-loop system where plants and fish mutually benefit each other. In this system, fish waste provides nutrients for the plants, and, in turn, the plants purify the water for the fish. Aquaponics stands out for its minimal water usage, minimizing the need for mineral or synthetic fertilizers or pesticides. Aquaponics enable the sustainable and efficient production of both fish and fresh vegetables.
Insect farming 	Also known as insect rearing or insect husbandry, is the controlled cultivation of insects and is increasingly recognized as a sustainable and alternative form of protein production. In controlled environments, insect farms breed and raise insects such as mealworms, crickets, and black soldier flies. Insects are rich in protein, vitamins, and minerals, making them suitable for human consumption or as feed for livestock and aquaculture. Insect farming has a significantly smaller environmental footprint than livestock farming, requiring less land, water, and feed resources. Insects can efficiently convert organic waste into valuable nutrients, making them beneficial for waste management practices.

Table 1 Applicability areas of INCiTis-FOOD

1.2. INCiTis-FOOD Living Labs (LLs)

INCiTis-FOOD is working in six African countries: Sierra Leone, Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon, Gabon, Kenya (Figure 2). In the following, these countries are addressed as INCiTis-FOOD countries. While Kenya and Nigeria host two living labs (LLs), the other four countries host one each, together representing 8 city region food systems.



Figure 2 Locations of INCiTis-FOOD Living Labs

In table below you may find a short description of each INCiTis-FOOD Living Lab.

INCiTis-FOOD Living Labs (LLs)	
1. AGLOBE Development Center (ADC)	ADC is headquartered in Lagos, Nigeria is a Non-Profit/Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) dedicated to research. It focuses on: Agriculture, Technology, Urban and Rural Development and Empowerment. To facilitate initial testing and experimentation for MVPs, the center has a compact station and screen spanning an area of approximately 48 square meters situated in the Alimosho Local Government Area of Lagos State, Nigeria.
2. Bamenda University of	Situated in Bamenda in northwestern Cameroon, BUST stands as a private university. Within its premises, the Living Lab finds its home in the Department of

INCIiTis-FOOD Living Labs (LLs)	
Science and Technology (BUST)	Animal Science and the Department of Agronomy and Soil Sciences. In addition to constructing a Living Lab for the INCiTis-FOOD project, the region where this lab resides benefits from two distinct climates—a rainy season and a dry season—which provide ideal conditions for testing and gathering valuable data.
3. Egerton University (EGE)	Situated in Njoro, Nakuru County, Kenya, Egerton University is the oldest institution of higher learning in the country. The Living Lab at EGE focuses on establishing sustainable and circular food production systems, and includes prototypes of Aquaponics, Hydroponics, Bioponics and insect rearing housed within a greenhouse.
4. Kenyatta University (KU)	The living lab is situated on the border of Nairobi County and Kiambu County, within the Nairobi Metropolitan zone. This area is characterized by middle-class residential estates and a significant population of low-income earners. Nearby towns host several local vegetable and food markets, which primarily rely on supplies from distant farming regions. The living lab will focus on implementing hydroponics and soil-less cultivation techniques within a greenhouse.
5. Njala University (NU)	Njala University, located in the Moyamba district of Sierra Leone, is the top university in the country. The Living Lab is housed within the Department of Aquaculture and Fisheries Management in the School of Natural Resources Management. Apart from constructing a secure lab for the INCiTis project, the department possesses advanced facilities such as a modern RAS (Recirculating Aquaculture System), a fish feed mill, and sets of concrete tanks for fish breeding and production. The department has established an integrated fish farm village that encompasses fish, vegetable, poultry, piggery, and insect production, serving both training and commercial purposes.
6. University for Development Studies (UDS)	Established in 1992 by the Ghanaian government, UDS in Tamale was envisioned as a catalyst for the rapid progress of the Northern, Upper East, and Upper West Regions of Ghana. UDS was established as a multi-campus institution. The Living Lab of UDS is situated on the Nyankpala Campus. This enclosed area boasts abundant shade trees and other ecosystem services, making it an ideal environment for integrated fish-vegetable farms. The site encompasses vast stretches of land, enclosed by corrugated wire mesh fencing. Additionally, a pavilion measuring 20 x 45 feet has been constructed to house an office and a storeroom. To ensure year-round production, aquaponic and hydroponic systems are located in a shade house, creating a serene and favourable atmosphere.
7. Université des Sciences et Techniques de Masuku (USTM)	Franceville, also known as Masuku, is a town situated in Gabon. Within this vibrant setting, the USTM living lab operates with a team of dynamic and dedicated individuals. The site itself engages in the cultivation of diverse crops and fish farming. It serves as both a production and demonstration site, welcoming, training, and providing support to individuals interested in establishing agricultural activities. One of the main activities is testing feed, aquaponics, different substrates, etc.
8. The University of Ibadan (UI)	UI is a renowned public research university situated in Ibadan, Nigeria. It was established in 1948 as University College Ibadan, affiliated with the University of London. The UI Living Lab is within the Department of Aquaculture and Fisheries Management focuses on the development of Aquaponics, Aquaculture, Hydroponics, Agronomy, and Insect Culture. These areas of study and experimentation aim to advance innovative techniques and practices in sustainable agriculture and aquaculture systems.

Table 2 INCiTis-FOOD Living Labs – short descriptions

1.3. INCiTIS-FOOD Open Calls

To reinforce multi-actor collaborations on main food system challenges and boost the overall impact of INCiTIS-FOOD, 2 Open Calls as part of the Cascade Fund and the FSTP mechanism will be launched. The budget dedicated to the Cascade Fund is 1,000,000€ in total. **For better urban and peri-urban food systems across Africa, the Open Calls will provide:**

- grants to 8 Local Innovation Hubs (consisting of 2-3 legal entities, 16-24 in total), can be located also outside the INCiTIS-FOOD countries – total dedicated sum 940,000€.
- prizes to 24 independent innovators from 8 cities and towns that are hosting INCiTIS-FOOD Living Labs (3 winners per LL) – 60,000€.

About 800-1000+ innovators (startups, SMEs, schools, etc.), external to the consortium, are expected to benefit directly or indirectly from the Cascade Fund. Applicants with circular and profitable entrepreneurial concepts, not awarded a grant, will be supported through capacity building offered by Living Labs. The Open Calls will be launched via a dedicated section of the INCiTIS-FOOD website and the INCiTIS-FOOD Innovation Portal at Smart.Agro.Hubs.eu. Applicants are expected to replicate and advance solutions developed in the LLs.

The INCiTIS-FOOD Open Call for Local Innovation Hubs (LIHs) has been successfully finalized and 8 selected winners are currently running their sub-projects.

2. INCiTIS-FOOD Open Call for Independent Innovators (II)

2.1. General Information

In the Open Call for Independent Innovators (IIs), INCiTIS-FOOD will provide total funding of 60,000€ to 24 Independent Innovators. Independent Innovators (IIs), who can only be start-up entrepreneurs and SMEs residing in one of the eight cities and towns within the six INCiTIS-FOOD countries hosting a LL, are eligible to apply. Each location will have 3 selected winners.

Independent Innovators who do not have an established sole proprietorship (i.e. VAT number) will have to establish one, in accordance with respective national regulations, prior to signing their subgrantee agreement. During the application period, they will submit a letter of commitment to establishing a sole proprietorship, should they be declared the winner of the Open Call. Start-ups qualify under the SME definition (see: EUR-Lex - 32003H0361 - EN; Art. 2) and are therefore eligible to apply individually.

Winners cannot be located outside of the cities and towns where INCiTIS-FOOD Living Labs are located. Winners are expected to conduct their activities during the 4 months period, with the aim of proposing solutions to the challenges identified.

2.2. Requirements for INCiTIS-FOOD Open Call 2

Within INCiTIS-FOOD Open Call for II, the following types of applications/solutions are expected to be funded, and it is applicable for all 8 LLs.

2.2.1. Technical requirements

The applicant:

1. should have a farm/home farming facility or unlimited access to one.
2. It is highly desirable that the applicant has attended training sessions at or visited the local INCiTIS-FOOD Living Lab.
3. Has submitted a detailed proposal outlining the way the selected challenge should be solved.
4. Is currently undertaking or is willing to allow integration and data collection on its production unit.
5. Is agreed to adhere to the local agricultural regulations and standards including the INCiTIS-FOOD regulations related to the desired farming, fishing, and insect production system.
6. Must have access to the necessary resources, including space, equipment, and water supply, to successfully implement the proposed project.
7. Has established a legal entity or is willing to establish one (according to the national legislation) in case selected for funding.
8. Has demonstrated ability to adopt innovative approaches such as integrating climate-smart techniques or utilizing technology for enhanced productivity in the desired farming systems.
9. is able to communicate fluently in English.
10. **Standards:** must comply with ethical, environmental and health standards set by the Living Lab.

2.2.2. Targeted topics

Within INCiTIS-FOOD Open Call for II, the following types of applications/solutions are expected to be funded, and it is applicable for all 8 LLs. Applicant is expected to select **one topic** of the following:

- High cost and limited availability of critical inputs for urban farming (e.g., feed, nutrients, water, energy, materials).
- High market prices for fish and indigenous vegetables, making it difficult to access affordable and nutritious food.
- Inadequate technical capacity and support for operating and maintaining agri-aquaculture systems.
- Environmental stresses and climate variability are affecting consistent production and food system stability.
- Low awareness and adoption of circular food production technologies, resulting, e.g., in overuse of scarce water and effluents.
- Limited financial resources and institutional support to sustain and scale Living Lab activities.

2.3. Submission procedure

The entry point for submitting all proposals for INCiTIS-FOOD Open Call 2 is the INCiTIS-FOOD website <https://incitis-food.eu/>, where the direct link to the application form will be provided.

Submissions received through any other channel will be automatically discarded. Documents required in subsequent phases will be submitted via dedicated channels, which will be indicated by the INCiTIS-FOOD consortium in the contracting phase.

An application reception will close at 17:00 CET (Brussels time) on February 9th, 2026. The submission deadline is absolute. The eligibility of the submission time will be determined solely by the system timestamp recorded in the application database upon receipt. Please be aware that any application with a recorded timestamp of 17:01 CET or later will be automatically declared non-eligible and will be discarded. This rule applies even if the online form remained technically accessible to the applicant after the deadline. Applicants are strongly advised to submit their proposals well in advance.

2.4. Timeline of the Open Call

INCIiTIS-FOOD open call 2 will be published on the **INCIiTIS-FOOD website**, <https://incitis-food.eu/>, and **Funding & Tenders Portal** on **December 11th, 2025**, and it will remain open until **February 9th, 2026, 17.00 CET (Brussels time)**.

The INCiTIS-FOOD consortium reserves the right to cancel the Open Call at any point due to any unforeseen circumstances. The INCiTIS-FOOD consortium also reserves the right to extend the call and/or launch an additional call, in case not enough applications of sufficient quality have been received via Open Call.

2.5. Language

English is the official language for INCiTIS-FOOD Open Call. Applications submitted in any other language will not be evaluated. English is also the only official language throughout the whole execution of the INCiTIS-FOOD project. This means all requested contributions must be submitted in English to be eligible.

2.6. Document format

Any document requested in any of the phases must be submitted electronically without restrictions on printing.

2.7. Data protection

In order to process and evaluate applications, INCiTIS-FOOD consortium will need to collect Personal and Industrial Data. FSH, as the Open Call Manager of the project, will act as Data Controller for data submitted through the OCH platform for these purposes. The OCH 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 OCH terms to ensure compliance. Please note that INCiTIS-FOOD consortium requests the minimum information needed to deliver the evaluation procedures or the support programme. Annexes 6: Bank Account Information and 7. Model Subgrantee Agreement, are provided for reference and will only be requested if the applicant is accepted in the INCiTIS-FOOD support programme.

2.8. Origin of the funds

All sub-grantees will sign a dedicated Sub-grantee Agreement with the INCiTIS-FOOD consortium. The funds provided to the Sub-grant Agreement come directly from the funds of the European Project INCiTIS-FOOD funded itself by the European Commission under Grant Agreement Number 101083790, and remain therefore, property of the EU until the balance is paid, whose management rights have been transferred to the project partners in INCiTIS-FOOD. This relation between the sub-grantees and the European Commission through the INCiTIS-FOOD project carries a set of obligations to the sub-grantees with the European Commission. It is the responsibility of the sub-grantees to fulfil these, and of the INCiTIS-FOOD consortium partners to inform them of these.

More details on obligations of sub-grantees can be found in Chapter 5.

3. Proposal Submission and Selection

3.1. Open Call publication

INCIiTIS-FOOD open call for II will be published on the INCiTIS-FOOD website, <https://incitis-food.eu/>, and Funding & Tenders Portal on **December 11th, 2025**, and it will remain open until **February 9th, 2026, 17.00 CET (Brussels time)**. The publication will be supported by the Open Call Kit, which includes the following documents:

1. **Open Call 2 text**, which provides the scope and objectives of the open call.
2. **Open Call 2 Applicants' Guide**, this document.
3. **Proposal template**, ppt presentation to be submitted in the application phase.
4. **Declaration of Honour (DoH)**, which declares that all conditions of the Open Call 2 are accepted by legal representatives of all consortium members.
5. **Declaration of conducting business**, which shows the business activities of the applicants; also, in case of SME, it shows that the applicant is an SME according to EC standards.
6. **Bank account information**, which collects information on the applicant's bank account where the INCiTIS-FOOD payments will be transferred to (only for winners of the Open Call).
7. **Indicative Model sub-grant agreement***, for information purposes only.

*This document serves as a reference. The Sub-grant Agreement that will be given to the winning applicants will be finalized during the contracting phase.

Note: INCiTIS-FOOD consortium reserves the right to ask for additional explanations from the applicants during the eligibility check.

In case the applicant is still not with registered legal entity, Declaration of conducting business is not applicable. However, instead of it, they must submit a letter of commitment to establish a sole proprietorship, according to the national legislations, should they be declared the winner of the Open Call.

3.2. Eligibility criteria

INCIiTIS-FOOD Open Call for II is aimed at individuals residing in one of the 8 cities or towns hosting INCiTIS-FOOD LLs.

- Applicants need to be a **individuals**, start-ups and small and medium enterprises (SMEs).
- The applicants must be **legally established according to the national legislation in order to be able to sign the sub-grantee agreement, in case they are selected for funding**. Having a valid VAT number is mandatory, however, in case having VAT number is not mandatory according to the national legislation of the applicant's country, a registration number from the respective national authority (National business registry, Commercial court or similar) must be provided.
- **Existing consortium members** of INCiTIS-FOOD project and their affiliated entities are **not eligible** for the INCiTIS-FOOD Open Call.
- The proposal is **delivered before the defined deadline**, applying the requested submission procedure.
- Proposals shall **only ask for funding for that part of the work that is not yet accomplished** and will be carried out after having been selected for funding. Of course, this does not exclude the usage of e.g., results, IP, infrastructures or approaches already held by the applicants.

- Each applicant may submit **only one proposal to the INCiTis-FOOD Open Call 2**. In case an applicant submits more than one application in Open Call, only the last one received (timestamp of the system) will be considered, and the remaining applications will automatically be excluded from the evaluation process. If the last submitted application is declared as non-eligible or below the evaluation threshold upon evaluation, the other submitted applications will not be taken into consideration.
- The applicants must **demonstrate that there is no risk of double funding**. The fundamental principle underpinning the rules for public expenditure in the EU states that no costs for the same activity can be funded twice from the EU budget, as defined in Article 111 of Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 1605/2002 of 25 June 2002 on Financial Regulation. In the case of applications submitted by linked SMEs, all must clearly state the differences between them, including but not limited to, technical aspects, market strategy and team composition, so that no doubt remains that there is no risk of double funding. In order to properly assess these concerns INCiTis-FOOD may assign all applications to the same set of evaluators and, should any doubt remain, exclude all applications.

3.3. Definition of eligible countries

For this specific Open Call, only applicants residing in 8 cities/towns hosting INCiTis-FOOD Living Labs are eligible to apply for. Namely, the applicants can be located in the following cities/towns:

- Moyamba, Sierra Leone
- Tamale, Ghana
- Lagos, Nigeria
- Ibadan, Nigeria
- Bamenda, Cameroon
- Franceville, Gabon
- Nairobi, Kenya
- Nakuru, Kenya

Applicants coming from other countries and cities/towns, regardless of the fact they are eligible to apply to the Horizon Europe programme, are not eligible for INCiTis-FOOD Open Call for Independent Innovators (II). Those applications will be automatically rejected.

4. Application process

The INCiTis-FOOD Open Call kit will also be available at the specially dedicated page of the INCiTis-FOOD website, <https://incitis-food.eu/open-call/>, as well as the Funding & Tenders Portal.

4.1. Application preparation

Please follow the steps:

- Please check the INCiTis-FOOD website for the Open Call 2 kit.
- For the application preparation, the applicants are requested to apply online and provide all necessary information. Please note that signing in with a Google Account is required to access the form and upload the necessary documents.

- Applicants must submit all requested documents on this application form. Applicants that do not accept the terms and conditions and do not sign and upload to the platform the completed proposal application (either as power point presentation, pdf, or link to the YouTube video), the Declaration of Honour, the Declaration of Conducting Business (or Letter of commitment that they are not registered but will proceed with the registration of the legal entity if selected for funding, otherwise will be discarded as open call winners), in PDF format, will not be able to submit the application. Later submissions of these documents will not be accepted.
- In case applicants have any technical difficulties, they should contact the FSH support team at maja@foodscalehub.com, milica@foodscalehub.com, krisitna@foodscalehub.com and natasa@foodscalehub.com by February 7th, 2026 by 17.00 CET (48 hours prior to the deadline).

4.2. The application reception

Submissions will ONLY be done via the provided form on the INCiTIS-FOOD website. A full list of applicants will be drafted containing their basic information for statistical purposes and clarity (which will be also shared with the EC for transparency). **An application reception will close at 17:00 CET (Brussels time) on February 9th, 2026.**

The submission deadline is absolute. The eligibility of the submission time will be determined solely by the system timestamp recorded in the application database upon receipt. Please be aware that any application with a recorded timestamp of 17:01 CET or later will be automatically declared non-eligible and will be discarded. This rule applies even if the online form remained technically accessible to the applicant after the deadline. Applicants are strongly advised to submit their proposals well in advance.

5. Evaluation process

The INCiTIS-FOOD consortium is committed to ensuring a competitive, fair, and transparent Open Call process. An internal Selection Boards for this OC will be formed in each one of the 8 Living Labs. The Selection Board's role is to perform the eligibility check of the received applications, confirm the list of applications that will be sent to evaluation based on predefined criteria, approve the evaluation results and communicate the results of the evaluation.

5.1. Eligibility check

Once the Open Call has been closed (February 9th, 2026, 17:00 CET/Brussels time), an eligibility check process will be carried out in order to discard non-eligible applications. The eligibility check will be carried out by Selection Board of each Living Lab, chaired by INCiTIS-FOOD partner managing the Open Call, Foodscale Hub, during February 2026. Only the eligible applications will proceed to the evaluation. Please note that only complete applications will be considered, those with missing information or missing answers will be discarded.

This procedural part of the evaluation will verify:

- i. alignment with the Open Calls' objectives,
- ii. eligible legal entities from eligible city/town hosting the INCiTIS-FOOD Living Lab,
- iii. the applicants are fulfilling the technical requirements and eligibility criteria set in this document.

- iv. Applicants' activities are under the domain of sustainable, circular, and inclusive African city region food systems and reduction of food waste
- v. Is the application written in English language,
- vi. proposal not pre-submitted in the other open calls,
- vii. proposed work to be carried out after the selection process,
- viii. all required documents are correctly submitted,
- ix. timely and in accordance with the rules, submission.

During the eligibility check the applicants might be requested to provide additional explanations if their application raises questions such as, but not limited to, ambiguity of the information, inconsistencies which are obvious errors, among others. In that case, applicants may be given 3 working days from the day of notification to correct or provide additional documents to complete their initial application. If the requested corrections are not provided at the specified time, their application will be discarded as non-eligible and will not continue to be evaluated.

5.2. Evaluation process

5.2.1. Remote evaluation

Remote evaluation will be carried out by the Selection Board (Coordinator, Open Call Manager, LL leader of the respective city/town), assigned by their expertise to a specific Independent Innovator will score and comment each proposal:

Criteria	Description
Alignment [1-5; min. 3]	Alignment with INCiTIS-FOOD scope and design
Impact [1-5; min. 3]	Solution output, community engagement (with special consideration given to women and young adults).
Implementation [1-5; min. 3]	knowledge and business experience of the applicant.

Table 3 Award criteria

Each criterion can be scored from 1 to 5. Half point scores are given. For each criterion under examination, score values will indicate the following assessments:

Score	Rationale
1 – Fail	The proposal fails to address the issue under examination or provides insufficient information.
2 – Poor	The issue is addressed in an unsatisfactory manner.
3 – Average	The proposal addresses the issue, but there are significant weaknesses.
4 – Good	The proposal addresses the issue well, but there is clear room for improvement.
5 – Excellent	The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the issue in question and if there are any shortcomings, they are minor.

Table 4 Rationale on the score values

The final score (including each criterion) is calculated based on the average of the scores provided by the Selection Board. The threshold for each criterion is three (3). If even a single criterion is given the average mark below the selection threshold, the proposal will not be selected. After evaluation,

proposals will be ranked. In case one or more proposals have the same score, a consensus meeting will be organized between the Coordinator, Open Call Manager and the LL leader. After the consensus meeting, a ranking list will be developed. Each evaluator will record their individual opinion of each proposal on an Individual Evaluation Report and the partner managing the Open Call, Foodscale Hub, will inform the applicants of the outcome of their proposals, via the Evaluation Summary Report.

At least 3 times the number of winners, will be invited to the pitching events at each location, out of which 24 in total will be selected to receive funding.

5.2.2. Pitching

The top applicants that succeed in Remote evaluation will be invited to the pitching events. The pitching events aim to deeply understand applicants' concepts and the feasibility of future integration of the proposed solution. At the events, the Selection Board will evaluate the following criteria:

Criteria	Description
Concept (40%) [1-5; min. 3]	Alignment with INCiTIS-FOOD scope and design
Integration level (60%) [1-5; min. 3]	the feasibility of the proposed solution's integration into existing LLs.

Table 5 Award criteria for pitching session

After the pitching event, a ranking list will be developed. The selected applicants will be the top 3 ranked applications. Based on the ranking place, the sum of the grant varies: best ranked will receive 3,500€, second ranked 2,500€, and the third ranked 1,500€.

5.3. Redress procedure

Within **three working days** of the delivery of a rejection letter considering the application as noneligible or an Evaluation Summary Report that ranks the application below the selection threshold, the applicants may submit a request for redress to the Selection Board of each Living Lab if they believe there has been a procedural shortcoming in the way their application has been evaluated or if they believe that the results of the eligibility checks are incorrect. The request for redress must be submitted in English language.

The redress may address the eligibility check and/or evaluation procedural activity of the application. The request for redress must clearly explain the redress points and elaborate on every stated point. Request must be:

- Related to the evaluation procedural process or eligibility checks, for example errors like a SME (with a registered VAT number) being discarded as ineligible by accident,
- Clearly describing the complaint,
- Received within the time limit (three working days) from the reception of a rejection letter considering the application as non-eligible or an Evaluation Summary Report that ranks the application below the selection borderline,
- Sent by the applicants' legal representative.

In this case, the Selection Board of each LL will examine the request for redress within five working days and decide whether the application in question will be re-evaluated or the request for redress will be rejected. If there is clear evidence of a shortcoming that could affect the eventual decision to select an applicant as a winning beneficiary of the Open Call, it is possible that all or part of the

application will be re-evaluated. The INCiTis-FOOD consortium is dedicated to ensuring a coherent interpretation of such requests and equal treatment of applicants.

Please note:

- This procedure is concerned only with the evaluation of procedural activities and/or eligibility checking process.
- A re-evaluation will only be carried out if there is evidence of a shortcoming that affects the final decision on whether to select the applicant as a winning beneficiary or not. This means, for example, that a problem relating to one evaluation criterion will not lead to a re-evaluation if an application has failed anyway on other criteria.
- The evaluation score following any re-evaluation will be regarded as definitive. It may be lower than the original score.

Only one request for redress per application will be considered by the committee. If more requests for redress are submitted, only the first request sent will be taken into consideration. The application that is approved for re-evaluation will be re-evaluated timely and prior to the contract preparation phase. In case an application under the redress procedure is re-evaluated and the new evaluation score is higher; it will be included in the final overall ranking. In case the application under the redress procedure ranks higher than the last application on the initial list set to receive funding, then the application under the redress procedure will determine the winner.

5.4. Notification

Upon concluding all of the post-evaluation activities, the final ranking list will be created, and the Evaluation Summary Reports will be distributed to all the applicants who have applied for the INCiTis-FOOD Open Call for Local Innovation Hubs, containing the marks and comments for each evaluation criterion and comments regarding the application as a whole.

5.5. Contracting

After all of the post-evaluation activities have been concluded and the INCiTis-FOOD Open Call winners have been selected, the INCiTis-FOOD Treasurer (Foodscale Hub) will start the contract preparation in collaboration with the winning applications' representatives. Contract preparation will go via administrative and financial checking.

The objective of the contract preparation is to fulfill the legal requirements between the INCiTis-FOOD consortium and every winner of the Open Call. The items covered will be:

- To validate the **legal status** of the applicant, the following documents will be required:
 - **Legal existence:** Company Register, Official Gazette or other official document per country showing the name of the organization, 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).
 - Legal proof that the applicant's organization is not under liquidation or has filed for bankruptcy.
- **Bank Account Information:** The account where the funds will be transferred will be indicated via a form signed by the legal representative and the bank representative. The account should be a business bank account of the beneficiary. The financial information should not be older than three months.

Note: In case an applicant shortlisted for funding fails to provide proof of legal existence (in case the applicant submitted the application as a natural person with statement that the registration process will occur if selected for funding), this applicant will be declined and the next on the list will be invited to the contracting phase.

The Subgrantee assumes full responsibility with the bank account info they provide through Annex 6. For instance, if they provide a wrong IBAN, and the INCiTIS-FOOD team proceeds with the transfer to that account, they will assume any costs related to the transfer (expenses with the return of the amount from the wrong bank account and/or expenses with the new transfer will be deducted from their grant transfer). Ultimately, in a worst-case scenario, if the INCiTIS-FOOD team does not manage to recover the amount transferred to the wrong bank account, the beneficiary who provided a wrong IBAN will not be able to claim that payment.

The request, by the INCiTIS-FOOD consortium, of the above documentation will be made within designated deadlines. The subproject contract negotiations are intended to be carried out between February and March 2026. In case negotiations have not been concluded within the above period, the application could be rejected with the next application in the reserve list to be invited.

5.6. Contract signature

At the end of the negotiation phase, the Subgrantee agreement will be signed between the INCiTIS-FOOD (Open Call Manager – FSH) and the selected applicants.

5.7. Funding scheme

The funding from the INCiTIS-FOOD Open Call is deliverable based, provided in two installments, to be distributed upon successful submission of the relevant deliverable and its positive review by the INCiTIS-FOOD Consortium. As such, there will be no need for cost justifications and getting the funding will be associated with the achievement of the relevant deliverables, which means that the administration burden of the subproject implementation will be removed from the Subgrantees. **HOWEVER**, the Subgrantee is required to keep all documents relating to their sub-project contract for five years after the conclusion of the INCiTIS-FOOD project, should the EC decide to arrange a financial audit to be carried out. For more details, see Section 7 – Financial audits and controls.

Implementation phases:

- 1) Phase 1: Plan – M01, report: D1 (50% of the funding will be released upon acceptance)
- 2) Phase 2: Implement - M02-M04, report: D2 (50% of the funding will be released upon acceptance)

The awarded applicants will receive their funding in three payments (50%, 50%), approximately one month upon submitting each of the relevant deliverables, reports on activities, and special targets in the form of key performance indicators (KPIs) and upon receiving a positive assessment regarding their deliverables from the INCiTIS-FOOD consortium. The structure of these deliverables will timely be made available to the winners of the INCiTIS-FOOD Open Call, prior to their submission.

6. Subproject Execution Summary

6.1. Support provided to Subgrantees

The innovations will be supported by cross cutting WPs dedicated to transparency, policy, business support, management and communication and dissemination.

During the implementation of their subprojects, the IIs will be required to submit two deliverables as conditions of receiving financial support from INCiTIS-FOOD. The template for these deliverables will be developed by the INCiTIS-FOOD partners and distributed to the awarded IIs.

The payments of the subgrant installments are envisaged in the month following the submission of the deliverable. In case these deliverables have not been evaluated positively, the INCiTIS-FOOD consortium will ask the Subgrantees for additional clarifications. This could have an effect on the timing of payments, as the positive review of the deliverable is the trigger for releasing the respective payment.

In case these deliverables have not been evaluated positively, the INCiTIS-FOOD consortium will ask the Subgrantees for additional clarifications. This could have an effect on the timing of payments, as the positive review of the deliverable is the trigger for releasing the respective payment.

In case the Subgrantee does not comply with the additional request by the INCiTIS-FOOD consortium or if the deliverables are not accepted upon receiving additional clarifications, the INCiTIS-FOOD consortium reserves the right to terminate the contract automatically. In such a case, all financial transactions made by INCiTIS-FOOD towards the sub-grantee (if any at a designated time) have to be reimbursed within 10 calendar days upon receipt of an official contract termination.

7. Responsibilities of the Subgrantees

The selected Subgrantees are indirectly beneficiaries of European Commission funding. As such, they are responsible for the proper use of the funding and ensure that the recipients comply with obligations under HE specific requirements as described in Horizon Europe - the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2021-2027).

Standards: must comply with ethical, environmental and health standards set by the Living Lab.

The obligations that are applicable to the recipients include:

7.1. Conflict of interest

The Subgrantee representative must take all measures to prevent any situation where the impartial and objective implementation of the subproject is compromised for reasons involving economic interest, political or national affinity, family or emotional ties or any other shared interest ('conflict of interests'). At the same time, applicants cannot be affiliated with INCiTIS-FOOD consortium partners, nor can they be employees of INCiTIS-FOOD consortium partners. All potential conflicts of interest will be assessed carefully. Please see more info [HERE](#).

They must formally notify the INCiTIS-FOOD consortium without delay any situation constituting or likely to lead to a conflict of interests and immediately take all the necessary steps to rectify this situation. The INCiTIS-FOOD consortium may verify that the measures taken are appropriate and may require additional measures to be taken by a specified deadline.

If the Subgrantee representative breaches any of its obligations, the Subgrantee agreement may be automatically terminated. Moreover, if the Subgrantee agreement is terminated due to a breach

made by the Subgrantee, the INCiTIS-FOOD consortium reserves the right to claim the refunds of payments made to the Subgrantee and suspend all further payments of the subgrant.

7.2. Ethics, Data Protection & Confidentiality

During the implementation of the subproject and for five years after the end of the subproject, the parties must keep confidential any data, documents, or other material (in any form) that is identified as confidential at subcontract signing time ("confidential information").

If a Subgrantee representative requests, the Commission and the INCiTIS-FOOD consortium may agree to keep such information confidential for an additional period beyond the initial five years. This will be explicitly stated in the Subgrantee Agreement. If information has been identified as confidential during the subproject execution or only orally, it will be considered confidential only if this is accepted by the INCiTIS-FOOD Coordinator and confirmed in writing within 15 days of the oral disclosure. Unless otherwise agreed between the parties, they may use confidential information only to implement the Agreement.

The Subgrantee representative(s) may disclose confidential information to the INCiTIS-FOOD consortium and to the selected reviewers, who will be bound by a specific Non-Disclosure Agreement.

Applicants must confirm that all proposed services, including the means of their delivery and upkeep, have been reviewed to ensure compliance with all relevant legislation on data protection, privacy, and fundamental rights.

The responsibility for meeting ethics and data protection requirements rests solely with the applicants in their applications and eventual implementation of their projects (if selected). The selected Pilots could be subject to additional ethical check-ups, performed by the INCiTIS-FOOD external ethical advisor, during application, evaluation and/ or implementation stage.

7.3. Promoting the action and giving visibility to EU funding

The Subgrantees must promote the subproject, the INCiTIS-FOOD project and its results, by providing the description of their project upon request from the INCiTIS-FOOD Consortium and highlight the financial support of the EC.

Unless the European Commission or the INCiTIS-FOOD coordinator requests or agrees otherwise or unless it is impossible, any communication activity related to the action (including in electronic form, via social media, etc.), any publicity, including at a conference or seminar or any type of information or promotional material (brochure, leaflet, poster, presentation etc.), and any infrastructure, equipment and major results funded by the grant must:

- (a) display the EU emblem;
- (b) display the INCiTIS-FOOD logo and
- (c) include the following text:

For communication activities: "This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under project INCiTIS-FOOD (grant agreement No. 101083790)".

For infrastructure, equipment and major results: "This [infrastructure][equipment][insert type of result] is part of a sub-project that has received funding from the European Union's Horizon

Europe research and innovation programme under project INCiTIS-FOOD (grant agreement No. 101083790)

When displayed in association with a logo, the European emblem should be given appropriate prominence. This obligation to use the European emblem in respect of projects to which the EC contributes implies no right of exclusive use. It is subject to general third-party use restrictions which do not permit the appropriation of the emblem, or of any similar trademark or logo, whether by registration or by any other means. Under these conditions, the Subgrantee is exempted from the obligation to obtain prior permission from the EC to use the emblem. Further detailed information on the EU emblem can be found on the Europa web page.

Any publicity made by the Subgrantee in respect of the project, in whatever form and on or by whatever medium, must specify that it reflects only the author's views and that the EC or INCiTIS-FOOD Consortium are not liable for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.

The EC and the INCiTIS-FOOD Consortium shall be authorised to publish, in whatever form and on or by whatever medium, the following information:

- the name of the Subgrantee;
- contact address of the Subgrantee;
- the general purpose of the sub-project;
- the amount of the financial contribution foreseen for the subproject; after the final payment, and the amount of the financial contribution actually received;
- the geographic location of the activities carried out;
- the list of dissemination activities and/or of patent (applications) relating to foreground;
- the details/references and the abstracts of scientific publications relating to foreground and, if funded within the subproject, the published version or the final manuscript accepted for publication;
- the publishable reports submitted to INCiTIS-FOOD;
- any picture or any audio-visual or web material provided to the EC and INCiTIS-FOOD in the framework of the subproject.

The Subgrantee representative shall ensure that all necessary authorisations for such publication have been obtained and that the publication of the information by the EC and INCiTIS-FOOD does not infringe any rights of third parties.

Upon a duly substantiated request by the Subgrantee representative, the INCiTIS-FOOD consortium, if such permission is provided by the EC, may agree to forego such publicity if disclosure of the information indicated above would risk compromising the beneficiary's security, academic or commercial interests.

7.4. Financial audit and controls

The European Commission (EC) will monitor that INCiTIS-FOOD beneficiaries and the Subgrantees comply with the conditions for financial support to third parties such as set out in Financial support to third parties (FSTP) Annex of the INCiTIS-FOOD Grant Agreement and may take any action foreseen by the Grant Agreement in case of noncompliance vis à vis the beneficiary concerned.

The INCiTIS-FOOD project will follow the lump-sum approach, where payments are released with the acceptance of deliverables, however, all Subgrantees are strongly advised to keep detailed financial records for at least 5 years after the completion of INCiTIS-FOOD project, in case of audits by competent EC authorities.

Moreover, the EC may at any time during the implementation of the INCiTIS-FOOD project and up to 5 (five) years after the end of the INCiTIS-FOOD project, arrange for financial audits to be carried out, by external auditors, or by the EC services themselves including the European Anti-Fraud office (OLAF). The audit procedure shall be deemed to be initiated on the date of receipt of the relevant letter sent by the EC. Such audits may cover financial, systemic and other aspects (such as accounting and management principles) relating to the proper execution of the grant agreement. They shall be carried out on a confidential basis.

The Subgrantee representative shall make available directly to the EC all detailed information and data that may be requested by the EC or any representative authorized by it, with a view to verifying that the grant agreement is properly managed and performed in accordance with its provisions and that costs have been charged in compliance with it. This information and data must be precise, complete and effective.

The Subgrantee shall keep all subproject deliverables and the originals or, in exceptional cases, duly authenticated copies – including electronic copies – of all documents relating to the subproject contract for up to five years from the end of the project. These shall be made available to the EC where requested during any audit under the grant agreement.

In order to carry out these audits, the Subgrantee representative shall ensure that the EC's services and any external body(ies) authorized by it have on-the-spot access at all reasonable times, notably to the subproject applicant offices, to its computer data, to its accounting data and to all the information needed to carry out those audits, including information on individual salaries of persons involved in the subproject. They shall ensure that the information is readily available on the spot at the moment of the audit and, if so requested, that data be handed over in an appropriate form.

On the basis of the findings made during the financial audit, a provisional report shall be drawn up. It shall be sent by the EC or its authorized representative to the Subgrantee concerned, which may make observations thereon within one month of receiving it. The Commission may decide not to take into account observations conveyed or documents sent after that deadline. The final report shall be sent to the beneficiary concerned within two months of expiry of the aforesaid deadline.

On the basis of the conclusions of the audit, the EC shall take all appropriate measures which it considers necessary, including the issuing of recovery orders regarding all or part of the payments made by it and the application of any applicable sanction.

The European Court of Auditors shall have the same rights as the EC, notably right of access, for the purpose of checks and audits, without prejudice to its own rules.

In addition, the EC may carry out on-the-spot checks and inspections in accordance with Council Regulation (Euratom, EC) No 2185/96 of 11 November 1996 concerning on-the-spot checks and inspections carried out by the Commission in order to protect the European Communities' financial interests against fraud and other irregularities.

7.5. Subproject Communication of important changes

The Subgrantee representative should:

- Provide any notice be in writing to the INCiTIS-FOOD consortium;
- Notify immediately any change of persons or contact details to the INCiTIS-FOOD Coordinator. The address list shall be accessible to all concerned.

7.6. Originality of the sub-granted projects

It is required that applications submitted are based on original works by the applicants and that their foreseen developments are free from third party rights. INCiTis-FOOD consortium is not obliged to verify the authenticity of the ownership of the foreseen products/ services. Any issues delivered from third party claims that arise as a result of the sub-granted projects are on the sole responsibility of the applicant.

7.7. IPR Ownership of the sub-granted projects

Each Subgrantee that generates results owns the attached Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) generated during the development process and will own results that are not IPRs. Each subgrantee is responsible for the management and protection of its IPRs and bears the costs associated with this.

The Subgrantees funded within the INCiTis-FOOD project will be the unique owners of the technologies created within the framework of their sub-granted projects. Parts of their works will be requested to be public for INCiTis-FOOD dissemination purposes.

Important note: all the solutions developed or enhanced through the INCiTis-FOOD project need to be open source, meaning they should be offered to the public after the end of the project.

7.8. Liability

INCiTis-FOOD consortium and the European Commission cannot be held liable for any acts or omissions of the applicant in relation to the selected sub-granted project implemented by the Subgrantee. The INCiTis-FOOD Consortium shall not be liable for any defaults of any products, processes or services created in the sub-granted project. Including, for instance, anomalies in the functioning or performance thereof.

In case any damage is caused to a third party by the Subgrantee, the Subgrantee will assume full responsibility for the damage caused. In no way will the INCiTis-FOOD Consortium be responsible for any damages caused by the Subgrantee.

Subgrantees shall bear sole responsibility for ensuring that their acts within the framework of their sub-granted projects do not infringe third party rights.

7.9. Do No Significant Harm (DNSH)

Subgrantees must always respect the 'Do No Significant Harm Principle'. The Commission Communication on the European Green Deal introduced the green oath to 'do no harm'. The 'Do No Significant Harm' (DNSH) principle has been further specified in the EU Regulation on the establishment of a framework to facilitate sustainable investments (**Regulation (EU) 2019/2088**), commonly defined as the 'EU Taxonomy Regulation'. Six environmental objectives are listed in Article 23 of the EU Taxonomy and Article 17 specifies what can constitute a 'significant harm' for these objectives. Thus, the regulation provides that no measure should lead to significant harm to any of the six environmental objectives within the meaning of Article 17 of the Taxonomy Regulation.