

# 2026 DIGITAL ENERGY CHALLENGE

## “CALL FOR PROJECTS RULES”

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# 1 ARTICLE 1 – DEFINITIONS

**Additional Documents:** all relevant documentation requested by the Consultant in the process of the Advanced Analysis, to be submitted within the deadlines set by the Consultant.

**Advanced Analysis:** period of in-depth analysis of applications occurring between the pre-selection and selection committees. Applicants to the Digital Energy Partnership will, in addition, have the opportunity to test their solution during the testing phase and undergo a flash due diligence (for more information, see Article 8.3).

**Applicant:** innovative SME which applied following the procedure via the dedicated Challenge Platform. Refer to the following sections for a more precise definition of innovative SMEs (Article 6.2).

**Awardee:** entity selected as final winner of the Challenge and receiving a prize at the awards ceremony.

**Call for Projects / Challenge:** the process by which the Organiser invites project owners to apply for Digital Energy funding for projects verifying several criteria through a competitive tender procedure. It is composed of two categories:

- The Digital Energy Challenge Tech Accelerator, supporting digital, R&D and innovation projects aligned with the themes defined in Article 6.1
- The Digital Energy Challenge Partnership, supporting a flagship collaborative project in Nigeria, led by the Abuja Electricity Distribution Company (AEDC) in partnership with an innovative SME aligned with the themes defined in Article 6.1

**Call for Projects Rules / Regulations:** the present document.

**Challenge Platform:** website ([French version](#) and [English version](#)) on which applicants can submit their application online and download all documents relating to the Challenge: the Call for Projects Rules (this document), the ‘Frequently Asked Questions’ document, and the ‘Application Journey’ document.

**Consultant:** the consortium composed of AETS and Blunomy consulting firms, in charge of the design and management of the call for projects, sourcing of applicants and their evaluation, legal agreements with awardees, as well as communication around the Challenge.

**Digital:** any telecom/computer/cloud-based technology which can be either:

- Developed as the core value proposition (i.e. the main service or product offer) of the project
- Or used by a project at the core of its innovative business model (i.e. as a key means to an end)

**Digital Energy (formerly Digital Energy Facility):** programme funded by the European Union and implemented by Agence française de développement (AFD) aiming to support the integration of renewable energy sources into the grid, increase energy access and improve the performance of power utilities while reducing technical and commercial losses.

**Existing Rights (background IP):** all Intellectual Property Rights and know-how held by an Applicant prior to the start date of the Challenge.

**Expert Support:** Third-party company supporting the winning innovative SME in the implementation of its project in one or several of the following areas:

- 360 diagnosis,
- Technical expertise,
- Strategic/Expert Support,
- Accounting/financial support,
- Operation reporting tools development and support

Expert support is mandatory, and a specific share of the funding request must be allocated to it. This share varies depending on the category, Partnership or Tech Accelerator. Please refer to Articles 10.1 and 10.2 for more details.

**Innovative:** corresponding to the development of a new product or process compared to an existing market. A solution can be considered either as intrinsically innovative (e.g., big new data solutions for network energy loss detection/location) or in comparison with the local context.

**Intellectual Property Rights:** means any patent, utility certificate, design, model, copyright, trademark, database producer rights and any other rights of intellectual or industrial property of any kind, as well as patent applications, or other titles.

**KYC:** “Know Your Customer” guidelines, mandatory process by which the Consultant verifies the identity, suitability, and risks involved with maintaining a business relationship with a potential Awardee. For more details, refer to article 12 of this document.

**Own Rights (foreground IP):** any Intellectual Property Right or know-how developed or acquired by an applicant after the start date of the Challenge, without the contest of another party, whether within the framework of the Challenge or not.

**Organiser:** Agence française de développement (AFD), public establishment registered in the Paris Trade and Companies Register under the number B775665599, whose registered office is located at 5, rue Roland Barthes, 75012 Paris. AFD oversees the Digital Energy programme implementation.

**Pre-selection committee:** meeting during which applications are reviewed to determine which ones will be selected for Advanced Analysis.

**Project:** any entrepreneurial project encompassing:

- The launch/scale-up of a new innovative digital solution
- The deployment/scale-up of a new innovative digital-enabled activity (e.g., in a new area, city, etc.)
- The implementation of a new/innovative digital technology into an existing business (e.g., integration of an innovative software within an existing business).

**R&D activities/projects:** innovative activities (i.e. generating new knowledge or applying knowledge in new ways), that are also creative, systematic, and uncertain in outcome, that aim to produce generalisable findings, evidence, or innovations and use rigorous research methodologies.

**Results:** any work (including software in its source code version and object code), creation, invention, specification, information, knowledge or process, or product and any resulting process, whether likely to be protected by an Intellectual Property Right or to be qualified to know-how, developed by one or more Applicants as part of the Challenge.

**Selection committee:** meeting during which the preselected applications are reviewed to decide on the Awardees.

**Utility:** Abuja Electricity Distribution Company, hereafter AEDC. The Utility expressed needs refined by the Consultant and will have a decision role in the Digital Energy Partnership’s pre-selection and selection phases.

## 2 Article 2 – Purpose of the regulation

The purpose of the present Regulations document is to define the conditions and rules of participation in the Challenge.

The Applicant acknowledges that it has been informed and agrees that the proposed Challenge will call upon its sagacity, skill, and ingenuity for tests of serious difficulty. The Challenge does not depend in any way, even partially, on chance and luck, and may not therefore resemble or be considered as a lottery within the meaning of the Law of 21 May 1936 on the prohibition of lotteries.

### 3 ARTICLE 3 – CONTEXT

Since 2020, Agence Française de Développement (AFD) has been implementing the Digital Energy initiative funded by the DG INTPA of the European and the French Agency for Ecological Transition ADEME, with D4D hub and ESA as strategic partners. Digital Energy aims to improve access to energy by supporting the development and deployment of innovative digital solutions across Africa. The program also fosters innovation and entrepreneurship by building bridges between innovative SMEs developing new solutions and public and private entities responsible for delivering energy services. More broadly, it contributes to the European Global Gateway strategy, which promotes “sustainable and reliable connections [...] serving citizens and the planet”, by supporting sustainable investments that enhance equitable access to energy infrastructure, including through the involvement of the European private sector. This document refers to Component 2 of the Digital Energy Program: **The Digital Energy Challenge**.

The 6th edition of the Challenge is **co-financed for the first time by the EU and the British Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO)**. It will enable collaboration between utilities and SMEs to develop, test and deploy digital and AI-enabled solutions that can improve both access to clean energy and the operational performance of utilities. At the same time, the initiative seeks to strengthen local innovation capacity and generate scalable models that can benefit the Nigerian power sector and the wider African energy market.

The 2026 Digital Energy Challenge will serve as a utility-tailored R&D and innovation sandbox, enabling SMEs to pilot and validate digital and AI-driven solutions. Through competitive selection and live testing using real utility data, the program generates empirical evidence on how emerging technologies can address operational bottlenecks. These insights will feed into policy dialogue and market development efforts, contributing to the acceleration of energy access in line with the Mission 300 (M300) initiative.

The present Regulations document relates to the holding of an annual Call for Projects split in two categories:

- **The ‘Digital Energy Challenge | Partnership’ (EU funded), abbreviated as ‘Digital Energy Partnership’ or ‘Partnership’:** Following a preselection process based on the innovative nature of the proposed technological solutions and other eligibility criteria, the winning SME will establish a partnership the Utility. This SME will be granted access to the Utility’s real operational data. A **Digital Energy Partnership Grant** of €400k will cover both a grant and dedicated Expert Support over a follow-up period of 12 to 18 months to implement a collaborative innovative digital project addressing pre-identified utility needs. By creating a utility-integrated sandbox environment, it allows the SME to validate its solution under real operational conditions and generate evidence on system performance and efficiency.
- **The ‘Digital Energy Challenge | Tech Accelerator’ (EU and FCDO co-funded), abbreviated as ‘Digital Energy Tech Accelerator’ or ‘Tech Accelerator’:** In this second open call, three to four innovative SMEs will each receive a grant based on the innovative nature of the technological solution proposed to address challenges faced by the Nigerian utility preselected for the Digital Energy Partnership Challenge (AEDC). Although the challenges are defined in collaboration with the Utility, the proposed solutions may be relevant to African energy utilities in general. The **Digital Energy Tech Accelerator**, with a maximum amount of €150k per project, combines direct financial support (grant) and Expert Support over a follow-up period of 12 to 18 months after the award ceremony. The purpose is to support the scaling-up of digital innovations and/or business model responding to the identified utility needs.

The objectives of the Digital Energy Challenge are to promote digital innovations/business models that improve energy utilities’ performance and quality of service, increase access to efficient, resilient, and low-carbon energy services for all, and contribute to AFD’s energy transition strategy. This initiative will generate actionable insights on how to overcome bottlenecks in the energy sector, thereby informing policy frameworks linked to Mission 300 and the Global Gateway strategy. It will also serve as a technical testbed for evaluating the interface between decentralised renewable energy (DRE) solutions and utilities, producing validated use cases that can support broader digital and AI strategies, fostering bounds and synergies between innovative SMEs and utilities.

## 4 ARTICLE 4 – SIXTH CHALLENGE TIMETABLE

All dates related to the application, advanced analysis, preselection, selection, and awarding phases, as communicated by the Organiser, are provisional and are subject to future adjustments by the Organiser. Such changes will be communicated directly through the dedicated Challenge Platform.

Any date defined in the Regulations is defined as per the Paris time zone (GMT +1). These deadlines are binding on Applicants, and no extension or waiver will be granted to an Applicant for any reason whatsoever.

	Steps	Dates YEAR 6 (Y6)
T0	Official opening of the fifth Call for Projects	20 April 2026
T1	Deadline for applications submission	17 June 2026 at 23:59 CET
T2	Holding of the pre-selection committee and notification to the pre-selected applicants	By end July 2026
T3	End of the advanced analysis and KYC checks <sup>1</sup> Final Selection Evaluation	By early September 2026
T4	Holding of the selection committee and notification to the selected applicants	By mid-September 2026
T5	Meeting with the Consultant and finalisation of the project (scope, budget, evaluation of Expert Support, etc.)	By end November 2026
T6	Notification of award	By end November 2026
T7	Awards ceremony and Bootcamp	December 2026
T8	Grant agreement finalisation and signature	December 2026-June 2027
T9	Support plan implementation	Grant Agreement signed + 18 months maximum

## 5 ARTICLE 5 – REGISTRATION AND APPLICATION TO THE CHALLENGE

The application phase will run from April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2026, to June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2026, 23:59 CET.

Once the Challenge is officially launched, all innovative SMEs wishing to submit their application will be required to:

<sup>1</sup> For the Tech Accelerator applicants, the KYC checks are applicable to final winners only and will take place after the selection committee.

- Download their application pack before the end of the application phase, on the following pages of Challenge Platform:
  - o For Digital Energy Challenge Tech Accelerator: [French version](#), [English version](#)
  - o For Digital Energy Challenge Partnership: [French version](#), [English version](#)
- Send any request or question about the Challenge to [contact@afddigitalenergychallenge.com](mailto:contact@afddigitalenergychallenge.com).

By applying online, the Applicant agrees to the present rules and gives their authorisation to be contacted by the Organiser and/or Consultant in the context of the Challenge.

The Applicant which submitted a complete application form and supporting files will receive an e-mail to acknowledge that their application to the Challenge has been considered.

Any electronic application form with missing information, incorrect information or information that cannot be considered will result in the disqualification of the Applicant. The Organiser will not accept any elements submitted by the Applicant after the set deadlines, nor documents that are not in compliance with the requirements of the present Rules.

The Applicants undertake to answer any request for information or document on behalf of the Organiser.

Questions from all Applicants and answers by the Organiser and the Consultant will be available in a regularly updated FAQ document on the Challenge Platform.

In addition, please keep the following information in mind:

- **It is possible to apply to both categories**, Digital Energy Partnership and Tech Accelerator. In this case, the company will submit separate applications and follow both tracks independently (two application forms, two committees, two round of interviews...). Nevertheless, one SME cannot win both categories.
- **Projects previously awarded within the Digital Energy Challenge framework are not eligible for the subsequent editions**, however, it is possible for an innovative SME that has been awarded in the past to reapply, if it is a different project from the one that received the award, provided that the success of the awarded project is proven and the entity can demonstrate growth in business since the first award.

## 6 ARTICLE 6 – ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

This article outlines the eligibility criteria for both the Digital Energy Challenge Tech Accelerator and the Digital Energy Challenge Partnership. Meeting these conditions is essential to be considered for pre-selection.

### 6.1 THEMES

The 2026 edition of the Digital Energy Challenge focuses on three key areas where AEDC and several African utilities are currently facing challenges: (1) planning and investment optimization, (2) mini-grid data integration, and (3) network operations.

In this context, the selected themes are:

- **Product 1: Grid Planning and Investment Optimization**, including:
  - o Item 1: Implementation of advanced planning tools
  - o Item 2: Optimization of network investments
- **Product 2: Microgrid and DER Management Platform**, including:
  - o Item 3: Deployment of a Microgrid Controller with a VPP module
- **Product 3: Data Platform and Integrated Network Visibility**, including:
  - o Item 4: Improve network operation (network visibility and outage detection)



Note that products are divided into items for clarity purposes, but covering a product requires addressing all its items, either individually or via an integrated solution.

### **Instructions for Digital Energy Partnership applicants**

As part of the Partnership, applicants are invited to submit AEDC-tailored proposals covering **one or several products**, with Products 1, 2 and 3 reflecting the defined order of priority; however, preference will be given to proposals addressing the full scope of the projects.

Additional details on AEDC’s specific needs regarding those products are available in Appendix.

### **Instructions for Digital Energy Tech Accelerator applicants**

As part of the Tech Accelerator, applicants are required to submit a proposal covering **one product only**. No priority is defined between the products under this scheme.

Tech Accelerator applicants are not required to comply with AEDC specifications, as they may propose products tailored to the needs of other African utilities, or even not tailored to a specific utility, provided that the core intent of the product is preserved and that the R&D deployed through the project contributes to improving the performance of energy systems across Africa (the project generates relevant pieces of knowledge that are generalisable and replicable).

## **6.2 ELIGIBLE ENTITIES**

An innovative SME is considered eligible, if:

- It is legally established (i.e., properly incorporated) and can prove it
- It does not show a high risk of bankruptcy (high level of indebtedness, etc.)
- It states that it respects the KYC rules defined in Article 12
- It **employs fewer than 250 people**
- It **generated less than €50 M of annual turnover** in the last fiscal year or had a **total balance sheet below €43 M**
- It is **independent**, meaning that at least 50% of its capital must be continuously held by:
  - o natural persons,
  - o or by one or several companies meeting the same conditions, at least 50% of whose capital is held by natural persons,
  - o or by investment structures (such as venture capital funds - FCPR), provided there is no dependency relationship between the investment structure and the innovative SME,
  - o or by associations or foundations recognised as being of public interest with a scientific purpose, or by a company qualified as an innovative SME carrying out R&D projects,
  - o or by public research or higher education institutions or their subsidiaries;
- It **carries out research expenses<sup>2</sup> representing at least 20% of total deductible expenses**, excluding foreign exchange losses and net charges on the disposal of marketable securities, for the same fiscal year.

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<sup>2</sup> Eligible expenses are defined as follows:

- Depreciation allowances on fixed assets created or acquired new and directly allocated to scientific and technical research operations, including the development of prototypes or pilot installations
- In the event of damage affecting these fixed assets, the depreciation allowance corresponding to the difference between the insurance compensation and the cost of reconstruction and replacement
- Personnel expenses related to researchers and research technicians directly and exclusively assigned to these operations
- Additional remuneration for employees who are inventors of an invention resulting from research operations
- Other operating expenses. These are set at a flat rate of 75% of the depreciation allowances (mentioned in the first point) and 40% of personnel expenses (43% for research expenses incurred before February 16, 2025)

- It does not have any conflict of interest with the Utility

Note: While companies from around the world are invited to apply, proposals from local African companies are strongly encouraged and will receive favourable consideration.

## 6.3 ELIGIBLE PROJECTS

A project is considered eligible, if:

- It is digital, as defined in Article 1
- It is innovative, as defined in Article 1
- It includes a clear R&D dimension, as defined in Article 1.
- It addresses the 2026 thematic priorities given in Article 6.1
- It is beyond ideation stage (already piloted)
- It is implementable within 12 months, or it has established a clear retro planning to market entry
- It does not depend on regulatory changes

**For the Partnership specifically, eligible projects must in addition**

- Take place in Nigeria
- Be based on a collaborative approach with the utility, AEDC
- Provide a detailed financing plan stating the level of funding needed, the co-financing structure, the in-kind contributions, etc.

**For the Digital Energy Tech Accelerator specifically, eligible projects must in addition**

- Take place in one of the following African countries: Algeria, Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Congo Republic, Côte d’Ivoire, Djibouti, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

## NON-ELIGIBLE PROJECTS

- Coal-fired power plant projects,
- Projects for power stations to produce electricity from fuel oil and diesel,
- Infrastructures associated with an exploration unit for the production or storage of fossil resources or to produce electricity based on fossil fuels.

For further details please refer to AFD energy transition strategy (paragraph 3.3.3 “Proactively support the exit from fossil fuels”) available at the following address: <https://www.afd.fr/en/ressources/energy-transition-2019-2022-strategy>

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- Expenses incurred for carrying out similar operations entrusted to recognised or accredited organisations, universities, or qualified scientific or technical experts (under conditions)
  - Standardisation expenses related to the company's products (for half of their amount)
  - Expenses billed by research-performing or knowledge-disseminating organisations (e.g., universities, public research institutes, or non-profit research centres) for carrying out scientific and technical research operations under a collaboration contract concluded between January 1, 2022, and December 31, 2025

## 7 ARTICLE 7 – PRESELECTION AND PRIORITISATION CRITERIA

Within the application review period, the Organiser and the Consultant will validate the eligibility of the application in full compliance with the conditions referred to in related Article 6. In case of any missing document or inaccurate information, the application may be rejected.

The Organiser and the Consultant will run a preliminary analysis and select a shortlist of applications in accordance with the prioritisation criteria outlined below.

Common prioritisation criteria:

1. Digital, R&D, and innovation: Level of innovation and role of digital technologies, R&D aspects such as new findings generated, description of rigorous research methodologies...
2. Impact and benefits: Replicability, number of beneficiaries, jobs created...

Additional criterion for the Tech Accelerator only:

3. Path to success and risk profile: Relevance to the Utility, risk anticipation and mitigation, soundness of the project economics...

Additional criteria for the Partnership only:

3. Path to success for solution’s integration and risk profile: Relevance for the Utility, complexity of solution integration of the Utility, added resilience to the Utility, risk anticipation and mitigation...
4. Financial strengths and support needs: Business model robustness and project team skills/expertise.

For Digital Energy Tech Accelerator applicants, preselection will place emphasis on the first criteria “1. Digital, R&D and innovation”. For Digital Energy Partnership applicants, preselection will place emphasis on the third and the fourth criteria: “3. Path to success for solution’s integration and risk profile” and “4. Financial strengths and support needs”.

At the end of this preliminary application analysis phase, preselected Applicants will be notified of their potential progress to the advanced analysis phase by e-mail.

## 8 ARTICLE 8 – ADVANCED ANALYSIS

### 8.1 GENERAL

The advanced analysis phase will run from July to September 2026.

During this period, preselected Applicants from both Challenge categories will be notified and invited to participate, and the Consultant will provide ongoing Q&A support via email (with weekly response batches), mobilizing experts and utility stakeholders as needed.

### 8.2 FOR DIGITAL ENERGY CHALLENGE TECH ACCELERATOR

Pre-selected Applicants may be invited to fulfil and submit an advanced electronic analysis form (received and sent back by e-mail) for the Consultant to run a comprehensive analysis of the project with regard to the established criteria. On top of this additional form, the Organiser and Consultant will conduct interviews with project owners to complete the evaluation.

NB: Additional financial documents will likely be required so that specialised members of the selection committee or advisers can run a comprehensive analysis as well.

Any Applicant who submitted an incorrect advanced electronic analysis form will receive a request for additional information or documents by e-mail. Additional information or documents must be submitted by

return e-mail to the Organiser within five working days from the sending of the email requesting further information or additional documents, and within the deadline set for the advanced analysis phase.

### 8.3 FOR DIGITAL ENERGY CHALLENGE PARTNERSHIP

The advanced analysis phase will include two phases conducted in parallel: the flash due diligence, and the testing phase.

#### - Flash due diligence

Following preselection, applicants to the Digital Energy Partnership will undergo a flash due diligence, including:

- Assessment of the business plan: top line, partners, financing...
- Assessment of specific topics based on AFD and AEDC’s needs depending on the project (e.g., interconnection of mini-grids raise questions like the ownership of the assets, the expected growth / impact...)
- 2h+ discussions with the Consultant to present their vision, way to manage operations, reliance on funding partners, etc.

In that phase, applicants must be able to provide a detailed budget estimate, a team resources allocation plan, and the split of work and responsibilities between utility and innovative SME.

#### - Testing phase

A playground will be structured for the testing phase as follows: candidates will have the opportunity to verify their solution’s ability to interact with real, anonymised data from the Utility, with 2-4 weeks to prepare their demonstration. A budget of €5,000 per SME will cover demo-related expenses (FTEs, libraries, etc.). The €5,000 will be transferred to the SME provided that

- The KYC have been complete successfully
- The testing was duly carried out (no need for the testing to be a success / meet prioritisation criteria).

For the whole duration of this phase, the Consultant will manage continuous Q&A support via email (weekly answer batches), mobilising experts and utility stakeholders as needed.

## 9 ARTICLE 9 – FINAL SELECTION PHASE

The final selection phase for both categories of the Digital Energy Challenge will take place in Mid-September 2026.

Based on the advanced analysis, the rating of the pre-selection committee will be refined considering the quality level and completeness of information provided by the Applicant.

For the Digital Energy Challenge Tech Accelerator, the Organiser will invite up to 8 applicants for a pitch presentation and will select 3 to 4 projects after deliberation during the Selection Committee.

For the Digital Energy Challenge Partnership, the Organiser will invite up to 3 applicants for a pitch presentation and will select 1 project after deliberation during the Selection Committee.

## 10 ARTICLE 10 – FUNDING REQUEST

### 10.1 FUNDING REQUEST FOR THE DIGITAL ENERGY CHALLENGE TECH ACCELERATOR

The project presented by the innovative SME must be associated with a funding request of EUR 150K maximum (including grant AND Expert Support).

At least 25% of this funding request must be dedicated to Expert Support needs, or, in other words, a maximum 75% of the total funding request shall be dedicated to the grant request. This means that for a funding request of EUR 150K, at least EUR 37.5K must be earmarked for the Expert Support, and a maximum EUR 112.5K can be earmarked for the grant.

Note that the Expert Support envelope will be allocated at the discretion of the Selection Committee.

### 10.1.1 FUNDABLE EXPENSES (AUTHORISED FUNDS USE)

The fundable expenses include:

- The purchase of equipment directly related to the project
- The purchase of software and digital tools directly related to the project (e.g., software licenses)
- Subcontracting of any services directly related to the project
- Recruitment, remuneration and training of staff directly related to the project
- Administrative expenses (including custom rights and banking fees) directly related to the project

A minimum contribution of 10% of the amount must be provided by the Awardee. This contribution may be made in the form of a purchase or in the form of man-days allotted to the project.

The candidate must specify in the application form which specific expenses engaged for the project are subject to funding through the grant.

### 10.1.2 EXPERT SUPPORT

In addition to the grant request, the Applicant must express an Expert Support request. In the application form, the Applicant is asked to specify its main need for ‘Expert Support’ amongst the following purposes:

- A 360° diagnostic to identify assistance needs,
- Technical expertise,
- Strategic/expert advice,
- Accounting/financial support,
- Operation reporting tools development and support.

The Expert Support will not be systematically provided to the winning innovative SME. The Selection Committee will evaluate the Expert Support request and decide to provide it - or not - to the winning SME. The Selection Committee can also ask the winning SME to change its Expert Support request if the Committee judges that the identified need is not the most pressing one.

The Expert Support must be directly linked to the R&D aspects of the project (for example, no legal advice on company activities unrelated to the winning R&D project; however, support for the commercial development of the R&D solution is allowed).

After the definition of the Expert Support perimeter, the Expert Support supplier will be selected by the winning SME based on a shortlist agreed with the Consultant and validated by the Organiser.

A contract will be established between the Expert Support supplier and the Consultant, and the Expert Support amount will be paid by the Consultant directly to the supplier.

## 10.2 FUNDING REQUEST FOR THE DIGITAL ENERGY CHALLENGE PARTNERSHIP

The applicant must present a budget estimate for the Project as part of the application process.

As specified in the application form, the project presented should include a funding request of EUR 400K maximum (including grant AND Expert Support).

At least 15% of the funding request must be dedicated to Expert Support needs, or, in other words, a maximum 85% of the total funding request shall be dedicated to the grant. This means that for a funding request of EUR 400K, at least EUR 60K must be earmarked for the Expert Support, and that maximum EUR 340K can be earmarked for the grant.

Note that the Expert Support envelope will be automatically allocated to the winning project, although the final amount will be decided at the discretion of the Selection Committee.

### 10.2.1 FUNDABLE EXPENSES (AUTHORISED FUNDS USE)

The fundable expenses include:

- The purchase of equipment related to the Project,
- The purchase of software related to the Project,
- The products and services provided by the innovative SME,
- The training related to the project and provided by the innovative SME.

This excludes:

- Utility employees' salaries and wages
- Taxes and fees
- Bonuses, provisions, reserves, or non-remuneration related costs. Employers' contributions to pension or other insurance funds run by the Organiser may only be eligible to the extent they do not exceed the actual payments made by these schemes and that the amount provisioned does not exceed the contribution that could have been made to an external funding
- Full-purchase cost of equipment and assets unless the asset or equipment is specifically purchased for the Action and ownership is transferred
- Duties, taxes, and charges, including VAT, which are recoverable/deductible by the Organiser
- Return of capital
- Debts and debt service charges
- Provision for losses, debts, or potential future liabilities
- Banking charges for the transfers from and to the contracting authorities
- Costs incurred during the suspension of the implementation of the Grant Agreement
- Costs declared by the Organisation under another agreement financed by the European Union budget (including through the European Development Fund)
- Contributions in kind. The cost of staff assigned to the project and actually incurred by the Organisation is not a contribution in kind and may be declared as a direct eligible cost
- Costs of purchase of land or buildings, unless otherwise provided in the Special Conditions of the Grant Agreement

### 10.2.2 EXPERT SUPPORT

Applicants to the Digital Energy Partnership are encouraged to consider a project management assistance or a project ownership assistance, especially in the case of a first collaboration. The Project owners will express and precise their main needs for Expert Support amongst the following:

- Technical expertise,
- Project management assistance,
- Project ownership assistance,
- Strategic/market expert advisory.

This Expert Support allocation will be analysed after the selection committee once the awardee has completed the detailed project description, budget estimate, funding and contribution charts, team resource allocations, split of work and responsibilities between the Utility and partnering innovative SME.

In practice:

- The final Expert Support will be defined after final selection by the Consultant and the allocated amount of the Expert Support will be re-validated by the Organiser at that moment,
- The Expert Support supplier will be chosen by the winning project owners from a shortlist agreed with the Utility, the Consultant and validated by the Organiser.

A contract will be established between the Expert Support supplier and the Consultant, and the Expert Support amount will be paid by the Consultant directly to the Expert Support supplier.



## 11 ARTICLE 11 – GRANT AMOUNT AND CONTRACTUAL MODALITIES WITH AWARDEES

### 11.1 GRANT AGREEMENT

The submission of any application implies the pre-acceptance of the Call for Project Rules, which will be made available for consultation on the Challenge Platform, and of the terms of the grant agreement, which will be shared with the pre-selected applicants in due time.

After the selection committee, awardees will be invited to sign the grant agreement. The preparation of the grant agreement between the Consultant and the awardees will be based on the model shared with the pre-selected applicants in due time.

The grant agreement preparation will involve a dialogue between the Consultant and the awardee to fine-tune technical and financial aspects of the project, as well as the Expert Support modalities. It may include adjustments or corrections to the proposal to address recommendations of the Selection Committee, such as changes to the grant amount and its scheduling along the defined project milestones. Provisions of the model of grant agreement are not negotiable.

The grant will not be considered awarded until the grant agreement is signed by both parties.

The grant agreement shall be signed between the Consultant and the awardee within six months of the Notification of award to the awardees. The period between the Notification of award to the awardees and the signature of the grant agreement may not exceed nine months. If an awardee exceeds this deadline, the Organiser reserves the right to cancel the award of the prize to this awardee.

### 11.2 STARTING DATE AND PROJECT DURATION

The starting date of the project as well as its duration will be specified in the grant agreement. Its duration should typically be 12-18 months (time to market or project implementation period). The milestones will be based on the project planning information submitted by the Applicant during the advanced analysis phase and discussed with the Consultant during the grant agreement preparation.

### 11.3 REPORTING AND PAYMENT ARRANGEMENT

The reporting and payment arrangements, as well as relevant deadlines for funding request and payments, will be fixed in the grant agreement.

The payments will be made by the Consultant provided that the corresponding activities are implemented in accordance with the grant agreement, funding capacity of the awardee and other obligations stated under the grant agreement have been fulfilled.

#### 11.3.1 REPORTING

The beneficiaries will be required to provide reports to receive payments, in accordance with the schedule and modalities set out in the grant agreement.

A minimum number of reports will be demanded from the awardee.

A template including evaluation criteria will be provided to establish the reports that will consist in progress updates regarding technical and financial matters.

As described in the grant agreement, the technical part shall include an overview of project achievement over the reporting period, covering:

- Progress of the project and project management milestones (compared to the project implementation plan and timetable),

- Challenges encountered in relation to technical and operational aspects and how they are being addressed.

As described in the grant agreement, the financial part shall include:

- Financial statements highlighting the grant’s contribution to the project over the reporting period,
- And the corresponding expenses justifications.

The awardees will be required to prepare these reports using the template which is included as an appendix to the grant agreement template that will be shared with the pre-selected applicants in due time.

## 12 ARTICLE 12 – KYC (KNOW YOUR CUSTOMER) ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Applicants must comply with a list of requirements to be eligible. These requirements are fairly standard and taken from the AML/CFT procedure available at <https://www.afd.fr/en/ressources/afd-groups-policy-prevent-and-combat-prohibited-practices-2020> and, for Tech Accelerator applicants only, from specific UK requirements (exact list to be communicated after the preselection phase). These KYC criteria include notably:

- Existence of a secured payment method for the transfer of funds to the project owners (electronic transfer, bank account)
- Identification document of the physical persons carrying out the project (beneficial owners)
- List of entity’s managers and board members
- Reputation investigation via internet on the legal entity and company directors
- Due diligence on international financial sanctions lists (France, EU, UK, United Nations) for the legal entity, the shareholders, the board members of the legal entities
- Analysis of the economic consistency between the activity of the legal entity and its income statement through financial documents
- Archiving of financial documents

## 13 ARTICLE 13 - INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

Existing Rights and Proprietary Rights remain the exclusive property of the Awardees which own them.

Moreover, they alone decide whether to protect any know-how, and to deposit or protect or defend any Proprietary or Existing Rights.

Unless otherwise agreed between the Awardee and the Organiser, the ownership of the Results rests with the Awardee.

The complete Intellectual Property section is given as an appendix of the grant agreement template, which will be shared with the pre-selected applicants in due time.



## 14 ARTICLE 14 – AGREEMENT ON PROOF

It is agreed that the data contained in the Organiser’s and/or in the Consultant’s information systems shall have probative force as to the information relating to the Challenge, including its implementation, and the selection process of Applicants and Awardees.

## 15 ARTICLE 15 - PROTECTION OF PERSONAL DATA

Participating to the Challenge implies to disclose personal data from the Applicant’s team members. The Consultant and the Organiser will be responsible for processing the data, for the purpose of organising and ensuring the proper implementation of the Challenge and its outcomes. The legal basis of this processing is to perform pre-contractual measures, in compliance with Article 6.1.b of the European Regulation on Data Protection.

The Organiser and the Consultant, in charge of the organisation of the Challenge, are the only recipients of the processed data. The above-mentioned data is retained until the end of the annual Challenge, corresponding to the date of signature of the grant agreements.

Applicants have the right to access their personal data and request its deletion. They have the right to refuse, rectify or limit the above-mentioned data processing and to request data portability.

To exercise their "Data-processing and Freedom" rights or for any further information, Applicants can contact AFD’s Data Protection Officer, by sending an email to: [informatique.libertes@afd.fr](mailto:informatique.libertes@afd.fr).

If, after contacting the AFD DPO and receiving their answer, the Applicant considers their rights are not respected, they can submit a complaint to the CNIL (Commission nationale de l’informatique et des libertés).

## 16 ARTICLE 16 - THE RULES

Participating to the Challenge and receiving an endowment require unreserved acceptance of and full compliance with all the provisions in the present Rules. The Consultant and the Organiser reserve the right to disqualify immediately and without compensation any Applicant failing to meet this obligation.

The Consultant and the Organiser reserve the right to amend the Rules at any time, including during the Challenge, with no obligation of notifying the Applicants.

A mention will however be made on the Challenge Platform.

Applicants expressly waive the right to any complaint regarding any amendments to the Rules.

The Rules are freely available in the Application pack downloadable via the Challenge Platform, and Applicants are encouraged to regularly consult them.

## 17 ARTICLE 17 - CHALLENGE CANCELLATION AND SUSPENSION

The Organiser and the Consultant reserve the right to cancel or suspend the Challenge under the following circumstances:

- Force majeure (supervening impossibility),
- Any kind of fraud whatsoever.

The Organiser and the Consultant cannot be held liable for the cancellation or suspension of the Challenge, in compliance with this Article, and the Applicant will not be entitled to any kind of compensation.

## 18 ARTICLE 18 - INDEPENDENCE

Registration and participation to the Challenge do not create a relationship of subordination in any way between the Consultant or the Organiser and the Applicant or members of the Applicant’s teams.

## APPENDIX – AEDC’S SPECIFICATIONS

This appendix provides details on AEDC’s specific needs. They are provided to help Partnership applicants design solutions addressing all products that will ultimately be integrated into AEDC’s ecosystem, if awarded the Partnership.

Preliminary remark: The following product initiatives build upon and leverage the deployment of a unified PostGIS database, ensuring consistency, interoperability, and scalability of the overall digital architecture, while QGIS and ArcGIS are used as visualization layers.

- ❑ Product 1 - Item 1: Implementation of advanced planning tools - *Integrated planning platform leveraging a unified PostGIS database and a network digital twin to support load forecasting, constraint analysis, and investment optimization including:*

- **Item 1.1 - Data & Load Management module (PostGIS)**

- Integration of data within the unified PostGIS database (assets, topology, measurements)
- Bottom-up load aggregation (customer → transformer → feeder)
- Calculation and storage of load profiles
- Load forecasting (short, medium, long term)
- Spatial analysis and mapping of growth area

- **Item 1.2 - Simulation and planning Layer (Network Digital Twin)**

- Electrical network modelling (topology, assets)
- Power flow simulation (load flow)
- Constraint analysis (overload, voltage, capacity)
- Scenario simulation (load growth, new connections, DER)
- Investment needs assessment and technical solution evaluation

- ❑ **Product 1 - Item 2 - Optimization of Network Investments under budget constraints** - *The project aims to implement a light investment optimization module leveraging a unified PostGIS database and a network digital twin to prioritize network investments based on cost-impact criteria under budget constraint including:*
  - **Network Digital Twin:**
    - Identification of network constraints (overload, voltage, capacity)
  - **PostGIS:**
    - Calculation of indicators (load, losses, impacted customers)
    - Generation of investment options (reinforcement, replacement, extension) based on identified constraints
    - Cost Calculation (CAPEX / OPEX)
    - Calculation of a multi-criteria score (cost vs impact) for each project
    - Ranking of investments by order of priority
    - Selection of projects based on available budget
- ❑ **Product 2 - Item 3: Deployment of a Microgrid Controller with a VPP module** - *The project aims to deploy an integrated Microgrid Controller and Virtual Power Plant (VPP) platform to supervise and control mini-grids, optimize the integration of distributed PV and storage, and ensure reliable operation across interconnected and islanded modes including:*
  - **Item 3.1 - Microgrid Controller**
    - Mini-grid supervision
    - Monitoring of electrical data from the mini-grid
    - Monitoring of generation and storage assets
    - Monitoring and control of points of interconnection
    - Exchange of operational setpoints
    - Management of interconnected and islanded modes
    - Management of transitions (voltage stability)
  - **Item 3.2 - Virtual Power Plant (VPP) module**
    - Integration of distributed PV systems and batteries
    - Estimation of available power
    - Short-term production forecasting (24 hours)
    - Visualization of aggregated generation, forecasted production, demand, and operating margins
    - Exchange of operational data with PostGIS (network, load, generation).
- ❑ **Product 3 - Item 4: Improve network operations (network visibility and outage detection)** - *The project aims to leverage a unified PostGIS database to improve network visibility, outage detection, and loss analysis, including:*

- Use of a limited dataset (selected feeders and transformers) for pilot implementation
- Integration of key data sources within PostGIS (assets, measurements, metering sample)
- Detection of outages and anomalies using simple rule-based analytics (loss of load, abnormal values)
- Execution of transformer-level energy balance on selected assets
- Use of existing GIS tools (QGIS / ArcGIS) for visualization
- Development of operational dashboards focused on prioritized field intervention lists (faults, overload, suspected losses)