BIOECONOMY GIANTS

FosterinG collaboratIon among primAry producers and beyoNd to promoTe Sustainable growth

# Open Call for Scaling up & Piloting

OC2



Circular Bio-based Europe Joint Undertaking

Bio-based Industries Consortium

Co-funded by the European Union

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## Project Information

| | |
|---|---|
| **Programme:** | HORIZON EUROPE |
| **Project Acronym:** | BIOECONOMY GIANTS |
| **Project Name:** | FosterinG collaboratIon among primAry producers and beyond to promoTe Sustainable growth |
| **Topic:** | HORIZON-JU-CBE-2024-CSA-01 |
| **Type of Action:** | HORIZON Coordination and Support Actions |
| **Granting Authority** | Circular Bio-based Europe Joint Undertaking |
| **Start Date** | June 1st 2025 |
| **Duration** | 30 months |

**LEGAL NOTICE**

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# CALL FACT SHEET

| Call Title | Call for Scaling Up and Piloting |
|---|---|
| **Project Acronym** | BIOECONOMY GIANTS |
| **Grant Agreement** | 101213069 |
| **Call Reference** | **OC2** |
| **Opening Date** | **1st November 2026** |
| **Closing Date** | **31st December 2026 at 17:00 CET** |
| **Total Budget** | **€ 280,000** |
| **Max Funding per Project** | **€ 70,000** (Max. 60,000€ per granted organization/legal entity) |
| **Number of Projects funded** | **4** (consortia from 2 to 4 partners) |
| **Expected duration** | **7 months** |
| **Target Audience** | Open to any **legal entity** (e.g. SMEs, large enterprises, RTOs, universities, technology providers, public bodies, etc.) holding a valid VAT number or, if not applicable/exempt under national legislation, an official National Tax Identification Number or Business Registration Number. Each applicant consortium must include **at least one primary producer** (see eligible profiles in Section 4). |
| **Information, templates and submission** | **https://bioeconomygiants.com/open-call-2/** |
| **Questions & Support** | **giantsopencall@apre.it** |

# 1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

## 1.1 Project Overview

**BIOECONOMY GIANTS** is a Horizon Europe project that aims to strengthen the role of primary producers and other rural actors in circular bio-based value chains, ensuring their meaningful participation and an equitable distribution of the benefits generated. The project facilitates the creation and implementation of innovative forms of cooperation between primary producers, other rural actors and bio-based industries, fostering viable and profitable business and governance models that support the circular valorisation of agricultural, agri-food and forestry biomass and by-products.

## 1.2 The Challenge: Empowering Primary Producers

Primary producers (e.g. farmers and forest managers) often participate in bio-based value chains primarily as biomass suppliers, with limited influence over strategic decisions and insufficient opportunities to benefit from the added value generated further along the value chain. BIOECONOMY GIANTS seeks to address this challenge by promoting Cooperative and Circular Bio-Based Business Models that enable primary producers to play a central role in the development and scaling-up of circular bio-based initiatives.

By strengthening cooperation among value chain actors, these models aim to improve primary producers' bargaining power, diversify their income opportunities, support fair value-sharing and contribute to the development of more resilient and sustainable bio-based value chains.

## 1.3 Objective of the Open Call (OC)

Through this "**Open Call for Scaling up & Piloting**", BIOECONOMY GIANTS aims to provide financial support to **four** collaborative **pilot projects** (BIOECONOMY GIANTS cases) focused on the piloting and scaling up of high-added value bio-based products, while strengthening cooperation and the role of primary producers in circular bio-based value chains.

The Open Call seeks to support initiatives that combine technological and/or operational innovation with innovative cooperative business and governance models, contributing to the development of economically viable, sustainable and resilient bio-based value chains. In line with the objectives of the BIOECONOMY GIANTS, the Open Call aims to:

- Support the piloting and scaling-up of high-added-value bio-based products through the valorisation of secondary or underutilised biomass.
- Strengthen the position of primary producers within bio-based value chains, promoting their meaningful participation and an equitable distribution of benefits.
- Facilitate the development and implementation of innovative cooperative models involving primary producers, other rural actors and bio-based industries.
- Optimise the use of secondary or underutilised biomass enhancing circularity and resource efficiency.
- Foster resilient bio-based value chains in the agriculture, agri-food and forestry sectors, supporting innovative products with market applications and the potential for commercial viability.
- Generate demonstrable results and success stories that can support the replication and wider uptake of innovative cooperative bioeconomy solutions and relevant BIOECONOMY GIANTS services.

# 2. SCOPE OF THE OPEN CALL

## 2.1 Scope of the proposed Pilot Projects

Pilot Projects funded under this Open Call must contribute to the objectives of the BIOECONOMY GIANTS project by supporting the piloting and scaling-up of high-added value bio-based products, while strengthening cooperation among value chain actors and ensuring a central role for primary producers.

Proposals must focus on the valorisation of secondary or under-utilised biomass originating from the **agricultural, agri-food or forestry sectors**, contributing to circularity, resource efficiency and the development of resilient bio-based value chains. The proposed solutions must fall **within the TRL 6-**

**8 range**[1]. Applicants must indicate and justify the current technological maturity of their solution and describe the progress expected during the seven-month implementation period. In project activities, particular attention should be paid to promoting gender equality and addressing gender-specific challenges, where relevant.

The Open Call adopts a **bottom-up approach**. Proposed projects must respond to concrete needs or opportunities identified within the primary sector and demonstrate how primary producers will actively contribute to project implementation, decision-making and value creation, rather than acting solely as biomass suppliers.

Proposed projects are expected to address all of the following interconnected dimensions[2]:

1. **Bio-based innovation and piloting/scaling-up:** applicants must clearly identify the high-added-value bio-based product(s) targeted by their proposal, their intended applications and the technological or operational challenges to be addressed. The proposal must describe the concrete piloting, validation, demonstration or scaling-up activities to be carried out during the funded period, including the operational context, the necessary infrastructure and resources and the expected technical progress. Potential application fields include, but are not limited to, sustainable bio-based packaging, bio-based materials, bio-based chemical intermediates, bio-based food or feed ingredients, bio-based specialty chemicals, biofertilizers, organic amendments, or similar high added-value bio-based products.
2. **Circular biomass valorisation:** applicants must identify the secondary or underutilised biomass to be valorised, its origin and its role in the proposed value chain. The proposal must explain how the planned activities will improve biomass valorisation, circularity and resource efficiency, indicating the expected environmental benefits and the potential to reduce dependence on fossil-based resources, where relevant.
3. **Cooperative business and governance model:** proposed projects should demonstrate meaningful cooperation among relevant value chain actors, with primary producers playing a central role. Applicants must describe the collaborative circular bio-based business and governance model underpinning their initiative, including the roles and responsibilities of participating actors, the involvement of primary producers in decision-making and the mechanisms envisaged for fair and equitable value-sharing. The proposal must clearly explain the improvements in cooperation, governance or value distribution expected to result from the funded activities.

[1] For reference, this call adopts the standard Horizon Europe Technology Readiness Level (TRL) definitions: TRL 1 – basic principles observed; TRL 2 – technology concept formulated; TRL 3 – experimental proof of concept; TRL 4 – technology validated in lab; TRL 5 – technology validated in relevant environment (industrially relevant environment in the case of key enabling technologies); **TRL 6 – technology demonstrated in relevant environment (industrially relevant environment in the case of key enabling technologies); TRL 7 – system prototype demonstration in operational environment; TRL 8 – system complete and qualified**; TRL 9 – actual system proven in operational environment (competitive manufacturing in the case of key enabling technologies; or in space). Recognizing that TRL classifications and metrics may vary across different bio-based sectors and applications, applicants are required to explicitly declare and substantiate their estimated entry and target TRLs in Part B of the proposal. Please note that projects are not required to span the entire range from TRL 6 to 8; rather, the proposed solution must fall within this window and achieve realistic, measurable advancement consistent with the 7-month project duration.

[2] Rather than a checklist or a rigid list of tasks to be copied into the proposal, these dimensions represent interrelated core themes that must be integrated coherently. While covering each of them within the proposal is mandatory, as reflected in the award criteria, applicants have full bottom-up flexibility to determine the specific scope, activities, and level of effort allocated to each, tailored to the maturity and needs of their pilot. **Applicants are strongly advised to consult this section in conjunction with the official Part B Template**, which details the actual narrative structure, and how these dimensions are scored.

4. **Market potential and value chain resilience**: applicants should identify the intended market application of the proposed bio-based product(s) and explain their potential for economic viability and future market uptake. The proposal should address the main opportunities and challenges affecting the sustainability and resilience of the proposed value chain, including relevant economic, organisational and market-related factors. Market studies and techno-economic assessments (TEA[3]) may be included where relevant to support the proposed piloting or scaling-up activities and assess future commercial viability.
5. **Expected results and future development**: proposals must define clear, realistic and verifiable results to be achieved during the seven-month implementation period, proportionate to the proposed activities, available resources and maturity of the solution. Expected results should address both the progress achieved in piloting or scaling up the proposed bio-based solution and the development, adaptation or strengthening of the underlying cooperative approach. Applicants must explain how the achievement of these results will be demonstrated and describe the potential for continuation, replication or further scaling-up beyond the funded period.

Funded projects will also contribute to the development of BIOECONOMY GIANTS success stories by documenting their main achievements, lessons learnt and potential for wider uptake.

**Exclusion of standalone bioenergy:** In line with CBE JU principles and the cascading use of biomass, proposals focusing solely or primarily on bioenergy or biofuel production (e.g., heat, electricity, biogas, or biofuels as the sole output) are excluded from the scope of this call.

## 2.2 Implementation obligations for selected Pilot Projects

In addition to implementing the activities and achieving the expected results described in their approved proposals, selected consortia must fulfil the following obligations during the seven-month implementation period:

- Attend Climate KIC's impact assessment workshops and mentoring sessions and submit their impact assessment for third-party validation, as further described in Section 2.2.1.
- Organise at least one BIOECONOMY GIANTS Open Day per funded consortium, in accordance with the requirements set out in Section 2.2.2.
- Cooperate with the BIOECONOMY GIANTS consortium and provide the information and data reasonably required to monitor project implementation, assess progress against the approved work plan and evaluate the results achieved.
- Carry out appropriate communication and dissemination activities to promote the funded project, its results and relevant BIOECONOMY GIANTS activities and services. Selected consortia are also expected to contribute to the documentation and dissemination of project achievements, lessons learnt and success stories, while respecting applicable confidentiality, data protection and intellectual property requirements.

[3] Techno-Economic Analysis (TEA) is a systematic assessment that combines technical and economic evaluations to determine the feasibility and commercial viability of a technology. Typical activities include analysing process performance, estimating costs, assessing financial returns, and identifying key factors influencing market deployment and scalability.

- Test a newly developed tool for circular and cooperative business modelling (COOMPY Tool) with a focus on governance and cooperation with a leading and equitable role for primary producers within the value chain.
- Meet online on a monthly basis with experts from the BIOECONOMY GIANTS consortium as part of the Support Program described in Section 2.4 (involving CIRCE and other specialized experts selected based on the pilot's specific needs) to receive dedicated mentoring, technical coaching, and strategic advice.
    - Every 2 months this session is extended to include representatives from APRE and FOOD+I to jointly evaluate financial performance of Pilot Projects and progress against their action plan.

  *Note: frequency of meetings can be adjusted to better meet the coaching needs of each consortium*
- Prepare and submit 1 interim (due at M4 of pilot projects' implementation) and 1 final report (due at M7 of pilot projects' implementation) on their progress and achievements (dedicated reporting templates will be provided to Pilot Projects).
    - *Note on approval and payments*: Submitted reports will be reviewed and assessed by the BIOECONOMY GIANTS consortium. Formal approval of the interim and final reports is a prerequisite for releasing the respective grant instalments (interim payment at M5 and final balance payment after M7, approximately one month following report submission, in accordance with the payment schedule in Section 3.2).

### 2.2.1 Climate KIC's impact assessment workshops and mentoring sessions

Climate KIC will provide selected consortia with access to its climate impact assessment methodology, tools and expertise, free of charge, to support the assessment of the potential climate benefits of their pilot projects. Each selected consortium is expected to participate in the activities listed in the table below and to submit their self-assessment for third party validation[4]. The purpose of this exercise is to a) train consortia on climate impact assessment and b) to verify that the selected Pilot Project has the potential to avoid greenhouse gas emissions compared to a baseline scenario and to quantify that potential. Each consortium will receive a Mitigation Validation Report validated by a third party at the end of the program.

| Activity | Duration | Location | Potential timing |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Impact Measurement workshop** | Part I: 60 to 90 minutes<br>Part II: 90 to 120 minutes | Online | Within one week in e.g. March |
| **Mentoring** | Two 45-minute sessions with a Climate KIC Impact Advisor per consortium | Online | E.g. from April to mid-May |
| **Preparation** | 6 to 8 hours in total | Online | throughout the programme |
| **Validation** | includes a 30-minute feedback call | Online | E.g. from mid-May to June |

[4] "Third-party validation" refers to an independent evaluation conducted by an objective Climate KIC Impact Advisor (who was not previously involved in mentoring the consortium) or a designated external expert, ensuring an unbiased assessment. All evaluating experts are bound by strict confidentiality and professional obligations.

The Impact Measurement workshop is the foundation for the following mentoring phase and validation phase and shall not be missed.

### 2.2.2 BIOECONOMY GIANTS Open Days

Each funded consortium must organise at least one BIOECONOMY GIANTS Open Day during the seven-month implementation period.

A BIOECONOMY GIANTS Open Day is a regional outreach event to be organised by each funded consortium during the implementation period. Its objective is to present the funded case, its expected or achieved results, the role of the primary sector, and its contribution to cooperative circular bio-based business models. The event should target relevant regional stakeholders, including primary producers, rural actors, bio-based industries, clusters, innovation actors, public authorities and potential replicators. Depending on the nature of the project, it may take the form of a short workshop, a demo session, a field or pilot visit, a stakeholder meeting or another suitable participatory format. In-person or hybrid formats may be adopted according to the objectives and practical arrangements of the event. As an indicative reference, the event should last approximately 2 to 4 hours and include a brief presentation of BIOECONOMY GIANTS, an overview of the funded project, its progress and lessons learnt, together with a stakeholder interaction or networking opportunity. The detailed communication methodology, visual requirements, and reporting template will be provided by Q-PLAN.

## 2.3 Eligible costs

Eligible costs can be distinguished in 3 basic categories:

- **A. Personnel costs**: Direct Staff costs: direct personnel costs for the hours worked by staff contracted by the beneficiary on the project
- **B. Subcontracting costs** (external expertise): These cover tasks assigned to third parties that are not project beneficiaries: work carried out by a provider which has entered into an agreement on business conditions with the applicant.
    - Subcontracted work must be clearly described in the proposal and follow procurement principles (best value for money). Subcontracts are normally wide in scope (implementation of a part of the project, i.e. action tasks). If a contract covers only individual equipment or consumables that do not constitute an action task by itself, this will be considered as a purchase. Only limited parts of the action may be subcontracted. Limited parts mean that subcontracting remains proportionate both in terms of share and type of subcontracted action tasks, as well as in terms of share in the eligible cost.
- **C. Other Direct costs**: this includes travel, equipment, consumables, and purchased services. Best value for money and absence of conflict of interest apply:
    - **C.1. Travel** – This covers travels and related accommodation and subsistence allowances needed for the execution of the project.

- **C.2. Equipment** – Depreciation costs are eligible if they represent the wear and tear of equipment used for the project, calculated based on the beneficiary's usual accounting practices and straight-line depreciation over its useful life. Only depreciation for the project duration is eligible. Costs for renting or leasing equipment, infrastructure or other assets are also eligible, if they do not exceed the depreciation costs of similar equipment, infrastructure or assets and do not include any financing fees.
- **C3. Other goods & services** – this includes, for instance, consumables and supplies (e.g. raw materials, office supplies), dissemination materials and activities (e.g. translation and printing costs or graphic designer fees for printed products such as leaflets or other promotional items in relation to communication activities; publications; conference fees; costs for speakers and interpreters), intellectual property rights (e.g. costs related to protecting the results such as consulting fees or fees paid to patent offices).

  This includes costs to organise the Open Days in the region (par 2.2.2).

**Budget Allocation Limits and Rules:**

To ensure balanced project implementation and active involvement of all consortium members, the proposed budget must strictly comply with the following thresholds:

- **Personnel costs (Category A):** Each individual partner must allocate **at least 40% of its own budget** to personnel costs.
- **Subcontracting costs (Category B):** Cannot exceed **30% of the total project budget** *(applicable when an external entity, including a PDI, is contracted to carry out a specific project task autonomously)*.
- **Other Direct Costs (Category C – total of C.1, C.2, and C.3):** Cannot exceed **40% of the total project budget** *(Category C also covers routine lab analyses or rental/access fees to a PDI operated by the beneficiaries)*.
- **Indirect costs (Overheads):** Not eligible under this call (100% of the lump sum must consist of direct costs).

Each partner will have to indicate their own proper budget. The project related costs (including related duties, taxes and charges, such as non-deductible or non-refundable value added tax (VAT)) are eligible if they fulfil the general eligibility conditions and are bought using the beneficiary's usual practices, provided these ensure the best value for money (or if appropriate the lowest price) and that there is no conflict of interests.

Additional eligibility information can be found in the Annotated Grant agreement by the European Commission[5]

[5] https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/guidance/aga_en.pdf

In order to be eligible, costs must meet the eligibility conditions set out in this paragraph:

- Incurred during the project duration; costs sustained before the project starts (e.g. writing the proposal or preparing the Grant Agreement) cannot be taken into account;
- Incurred by the beneficiary listed in the Annex 3: **Draft Sub-grant Agreement;**
- Real and not estimated; identifiable and verifiable in the financial records;
- In compliance with applicable national laws on taxes, labour and social security
- Reasonable, justified and must comply with the principles of sound financial management, in particular regarding economy and efficiency (i.e. be in line with good housekeeping practice when spending public money and not be excessive).
- The work related to the costs must be described in the proposal and reflected in the Sub-Grant Agreement; costs for work not described in the proposal cannot be declared.

Since the granting of a lumpsum does not foresee the delivery of a detailed financial reporting and timesheets, the use of the project budget will be controlled considering the technical advancements by the BIOECONOMY GIANTS' partners involved in the monitoring of Pilot Projects. The final technical evaluation (Par 2.2 and par 3.2) will assess the coherence of the money spent with the achieved results.

Applicants must comply with their national accounting procedures. Only costs generated during the lifetime of the project are eligible. Costs described in the submitted budget must be determined in accordance with the usual accounting and management principles and practices of the beneficiary.

## 2.4 The Support Program for Scaling-up & Piloting

In addition to financial support, selected consortia will benefit from non-financial support through a dedicated Support Program provided by the BIOECONOMY GIANTS consortium. The Support Program will include:

- Personalised assistance including monthly one-to-one mentoring sessions with experts, delivering strategic advice and practical insights to navigate project complexities.
- Technical guidance from the BIOECONOMY GIANTS Technical Board (CIRCE, AINIA, and EFI) and other potential experts based on the expertise required.
- Depending on the specific needs of the selected projects and the availability of expertise and resources within the BIOECONOMY GIANTS consortium, additional supporting services might include, among others:
    - A technology information service (news, projects, patents, etc.) and technological surveillance.
    - Innovation dynamics with experts to brainstorm or mature technological aspects of the business model.
    - Individualised technological mentoring service (including consultations with the network of experts, analysis and advice about technologies to be improved for projects success).
- Sharing of insights and lessons learned on collaborative and circular business models identified from the BIOECONOMY GIANTS project, where applicable.

The specific support activities will be defined in coordination with selected consortia, taking into account their project objectives, implementation needs and the services available within BIOECONOMY GIANTS.

The Support Programme is intended to complement the activities undertaken by funded consortia and does not replace their responsibility for implementing the approved work plan and achieving the expected project results.

# 3. FINANCIAL SUPPORT

## 3.1 Budget and Funding Rate

- **Total Budget:** € 280,000
- **Maximum grant amount per project:** € 70,000.
    - **Maximum grant amount per single organization/legal entity:** € 60,000
- **Maximum number of Pilot Projects granted**: 4
- **Funding rate**: 100% of eligible costs
- **Form of Funding**: Lump Sum.

## 3.2 Payment Schedule

Payments will be released according to the following scheme (indicative):

- **Pre-financing**: 45% upon signature of the Sub-grant Agreement (March 2027, M1 of projects' implementation).
- **Interim Payment**: 35% upon approval of the Interim Report (July 2027, M5 of projects' implementation).
- **Final Payment**: 20% upon approval of the Final Report (October 2027, after the end of projects' implementation).

*Note: for the purposes of Interim and Final reports, beneficiaries will not be asked to report actual costs (timesheets, invoices) but must demonstrate the technical implementation of the action and the successful completion of the defined activities.*

# 4. ADMISSIBILITY AND ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

## 4.1 Admissibility Requirements

To be considered admissible for evaluation, proposals must comply with all of the following requirements:

- **Submission channel and deadline:** Proposals must be submitted exclusively via the official online submission system before the call deadline specified in the Call Factsheet and in Section 5.4.

- **Language:** Proposals must be submitted entirely in **English**.
- **File format:** Proposals must be submitted as a **single PDF file** generated directly from the official template via digital conversion (text-searchable PDF). All parts (core narrative, budget, and declarations) must be merged into this single file. **Scanned copies of printed documents, even if saved as a PDF, are strictly not accepted.**
- **Template and layout compliance:** Proposals must strictly follow the official proposal template. Applicants must respect all formatting instructions (e.g., font size, margin width, line spacing, and section structure) and other requirements included in the template.
- **Page limit:** Proposals must not exceed the maximum limit of **10 pages** (excluding instructions, budget tables, budget clarifications and signed Declarations of Honour).
- **Budget table integrity**: The budget must be completed directly within the dedicated section/table embedded in the official proposal template, strictly following the provided instructions (also including specific cost categories' limits, see Section 2.3). It must be included within the final single PDF and its structure must not be modified, truncated, or altered in any way.
- **Declaration of Honour (DoH):** A duly signed Declaration of Honour must be provided for **each partner** participating in the proposal. All signed declarations must be integrated directly into the main PDF proposal. The DoH template must not be modified.
- **Completeness and evidence:** Proposals must be complete, including all mandatory sections and verifiable evidence of the obligations set out in **Section 2.2**.

Failure to comply with any single requirement listed above will result in the immediate and automatic rejection of the proposal as inadmissible.

## 4.2 Eligibility Criteria

To be considered eligible for funding, applicants and proposals must satisfy all of the following requirements:

### 1. Consortium Composition and Eligible Profiles

- **Collaborative consortia**: Proposals must be submitted by a transnational or national consortium of **2 to 4 partners**.
    - **Lead Applicant**: Each consortium must designate one partner to act as the Lead Applicant, responsible for submitting the proposal on behalf of the consortium and acting as the main representative during the application and evaluation phases.
- **Eligible Entities**: Participation is open to any legal entity, regardless of its type or profile (including but not limited to SMEs, large enterprises, universities, research and technology organisations, clusters, and public bodies).
- **Mandatory participation**: Each consortium must include **at least one primary producer** (or related actor) falling into one of the following eligible categories:
    - **Individual farms**.
    - **Large and small companies** that produce and market their agri-food and forestry products.
    - **Companies vertically integrated** with full control over the contracted farms and forests.
    - **Seed, nursery plant, and forestry seedling specialists**.

- **Farmers' cooperatives** involved in primary products processing.
- **Forestry cooperatives**.
- **Cooperatives of farmers** owned by farmers and foresters (second-degree cooperatives).
- **Producers' organizations** aiming to commercialize agricultural, agri-food, and forestry products.
- **Farmers' and foresters' organizations at regional level.**

## 2. Legal Status and Geographical Eligibility

- **Legal Personality & Tax Registration**: All applicants must be legal entities (natural or legal persons recognized under national, EU, or international law with legal personality, capable of acting in their own name and incurring liabilities). **All participating entities must hold an official and valid VAT number** or, where VAT registration is not applicable or exempt under their national legislation, an official National Tax Identification Number or equivalent Business Registration Number. Entities without verifiable legal status and official tax identification are not eligible.
- **Eligible Countries**: All applicants must be established in:
  - EU Member States (including outermost regions and overseas countries and territories) or;
  - Horizon Europe Associated Countries[6].

## 3. Multiple Submissions Rule

To ensure fair competition and prevent over-commitment:

- An applicant (single legal entity) may **participate in only one proposal** under this call.
- If a legal entity is involved in multiple proposals, or if identical/substantially similar proposals are submitted more than once, **all related applications will be declared ineligible and immediately rejected**.

## 4. Financial Eligibility and Subcontracting Limits

The proposed budget must strictly respect both the maximum grant limits per project (€70,000) and per single legal entity (€60,000) set out in Section 3.1, as well as all cost category thresholds defined in Section 2.3 (minimum 40% of each partner's budget allocated to Category A – Personnel; maximum 30% of the total project budget for Category B – Subcontracting; maximum 40% of the total project budget for Category C – Other Direct Costs). Proposals failing to comply with any of these financial thresholds will be declared ineligible and automatically rejected.

## 5. Exclusion Criteria and Operational Checks

- **Conflict of Interest:** Beneficiaries, affiliated entities[7], and partner organizations of the BIOECONOMY GIANTS consortium are strictly excluded from participating.
- **Double Funding:** Applicants cannot receive funding for activities already financed by any other European Union budget source. Selected projects cannot use these awarded funds to

[6] list-3rd-country-participation_horizon-euratom_en.pdf
[7] Being member of a cluster, which is a BIOECONOMY GIANTS partner, does not fall under the affiliated entity definition

duplicate claims in other EU grants. Compliance is certified via the mandatory Declaration of Honour (DoH).

6. **Scope Eligibility and Thematic Alignment**

Proposals must strictly align with the scope, objectives and mandatory focus areas defined in Section 2.

- **Direct contribution:** Proposed activities must directly align with the core thematic focus of the BIOECONOMY GIANTS call. Generic proposals, self-standing commercial activities, or R&D projects that do not demonstrably contribute to the stated goals will be deemed out of scope.
- **Consortium pre-check:** The BIOECONOMY GIANTS consortium will conduct an initial **scope & relevance check** during Step 1 of the evaluation process (eligibility check). Proposals considered **manifestly out of scope** will be declared ineligible and will not proceed to the external evaluation phase.

# 5. APPLICATION PROCEDURE

## 5.1 Submission

Applications must be submitted exclusively online through the **BIOECONOMY GIANTS Application** page available at this link: **https://bioeconomygiants.com/open-call-2/**. Applications submitted via email or other means will not be accepted.

Only one application must be submitted per consortium. The online form must be completed and submitted by a single individual (the designated Contact Person) from the Lead Applicant organization, acting on behalf of all consortium partners. All official communications regarding the application and evaluation process will be sent exclusively to this Contact Person.

## 5.2 Application Documents

All applications must be submitted electronically via the online submission portal available at **https://bioeconomygiants.com/open-call-2/**. The submission process is handled **entirely through this single portal**.

A complete application consists of three main components:

1. **PART A - Administrative Information (online form)**

   Filled in directly within the portal. It gathers general information about the applicant(s), legal entity details (including VAT number or official National Tax Identification Number), consortium composition, and key contacts.

2. **Impact pre-assessment (online form)**
   Answered directly within the portal. This technical questionnaire evaluates specific impact aspects of the proposed project.

   *Please note: this section will be formally scored by the evaluators alongside Part B and contributes to the final evaluation score.*

3. **Part B – Project proposal (PDF upload at the end of the online form)**

   Prepared offline using the official template provided and uploaded to the portal as a single PDF file before clicking submit. This document encompasses:

   - The core technical proposal (work plan, methodology, implementation);
   - The budget breakdown;
   - The Declaration(s) of Honour (DoH).

**Formatting Rules:**

- **Language**: English.
- **Format**: PDF.
- **Page Limit**: Part B of the Application Form must not exceed 10 pages (excluding instructions, budget tables, budget clarifications and signed Declarations of Honour).

## 5.3 Modification Policy

Answers of not-submitted forms will be saved when the online form is closed, and applicants can continue from where they left off. The answers are stored in the local browser storage and never leave the respondent's computer.

**WARNING**: Local auto-save functionality depends on individual browser configurations and privacy settings. In particular, rejecting storage/cookie permissions, clearing browsing data, or using private/incognito browsing may prevent drafts from being retained.

**Recommendation:** Applicants are strongly advised not to rely solely on the auto-save feature and to test the local auto-save functioning, or to draft and back up all answers in an external document (e.g., a text file) prior to filling out the form.

**Liability:** The BIOECONOMY GIANTS consortium accepts no responsibility or liability for any loss of unsubmitted data, lost progress, or any resulting consequences.

Once the Application is submitted via the online form, applicants will no longer have the possibility of modifying it.

## 5.4 Deadline

The deadline for submission is **31st December 2026 at 17:00 CET (Brussels Time)**. Late submissions will be automatically rejected by the system. It is strongly recommended to submit proposals a few days in advance to avoid last-minute technical issues.

# 6. EVALUATION AND SELECTION

## 6.1 Evaluation and selection schedule

| Stage | Expected Date/duration |
|---|---|
| **Evaluation** | January 2027 |
| **Communication of results to all applicants** | February 2027 |
| **Invitation to Sub-Grant Agreement Preparation to the 4 winning consortia** | February 2027 |
| **Sub-Grant Agreement Preparation phase for the 4 winning consortia** | February 2027 |
| **Sub-Grants signed** | By 28th February 2027 |

## 6.2 Award Criteria

Eligible proposals will be evaluated and ranked according to a clear set of criteria and thresholds:

1. **Concept description (maximum score: 5; threshold 3)**: this criterion assesses the clarity, relevance and overall coherence of the proposed concept in relation to the objectives of the Open Call. Particular attention will be given to the identification of the bio-based innovation and the needs or opportunities addressed, the contribution to circular biomass valorisation and the extent to which the proposed approach responds to the needs of primary producers. The assessment will also consider the meaningful involvement of primary producers, their role in decision-making and value creation and the suitability of the proposed cooperative business and governance arrangements to ensure their active participation and an equitable distribution of benefits.
2. **Implementation and Technical feasibility (maximum score: 5; threshold 3)**: this criterion assesses the technical quality, feasibility and credibility of the proposed implementation approach. The evaluation will consider the maturity of the proposed solution, the justification of its technological readiness level (TRL 6–8), the appropriateness of the planned piloting or scaling-up activities, and the availability of the necessary biomass feedstock, infrastructure and other resources. Particular attention will be given to the coherence and realism of the workplan, the identification of relevant implementation challenges and risks and the extent to which the proposed activities are expected to deliver clear, achievable and verifiable technical and cooperative results within the seven-month implementation period.
3. **Consortium Capacity and Budget Efficiency (maximum score: 5; threshold 3)**: this criterion assesses the capacity of the consortium to successfully implement the proposed project. The evaluation will consider the relevant technical, managerial, business and organisational expertise of the participating partners, the complementarity of their roles and contributions and the appropriateness of the resources allocated to the planned activities, including the coherence and efficiency of the estimated budget. Particular attention will be given to the consortium's operational capacity, the effective participation of primary producers and its ability to carry out the proposed work plan and fulfil the mandatory obligations of the Open Call.

4. **Ambition, Scalability & Replicability (maximum score: 5; threshold: 3)**: this criterion assesses the ambition of the proposed project and its potential to generate sustainable benefits beyond the funded implementation period. The evaluation will consider the potential for further scaling-up, market uptake and replication of the proposed bio-based solution and cooperative approach, as well as the credibility of the envisaged development pathways. Particular attention will be given to the expected economic and social benefits, including opportunities for income diversification, improved value creation and fair value-sharing for primary producers, and the potential contribution to more resilient and sustainable bio-based value chains.
5. **Climate Impact (maximum score: 5; threshold 3)**: this criterion assesses the potential climate benefits of the proposed pilot project, based on the information provided in the climate impact pre-assessment questionnaire. The evaluation will consider the credibility and relevance of the proposed climate impact, the appropriateness of the baseline scenario and the potential of the proposed pilot to reduce or avoid greenhouse gas emissions compared with the conventional scenario (scenario without the proposed pilot). Particular attention will be given to the consistency of the underlying assumptions and the extent to which the expected climate benefits are supported by the information provided.

Each award criterion will receive a single score from 0 to 5, according to the following scale:
**0 = None** (the criterion is not addressed at all, or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information)
**1 = Poor** (the criterion is inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses)
**2 = Fair** (the criterion is broadly addressed, but there are significant weaknesses)
**3 = Good** (the criterion is addressed well, but a number of shortcomings are present)
**4 = Very good** (the criterion is addressed very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present)
**5 = Excellent** (the criterion is successfully addressed. Any shortcomings are minor.)

| Criteria | Aspects taken into account | Points | Threshold |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Concept description** | Clarity and relevance of the proposed concept; involvement and leading role of primary producers; cooperative business and governance model; fair value-sharing | 0-5 | 3 |
| **Implementation and Technical feasibility** | Technical quality and feasibility of the proposed solution; technological maturity (TRL 6–8); availability of feedstock, infrastructure and resources; quality and feasibility of the work plan; achievable and verifiable results | 0-5 | 3 |
| **Consortium Capacity and Budget Efficiency** | Capacity, skills and expertise of the participating partners; complementarity of the consortium; operational and management capacity; efficient allocation of resources and coherence of estimated budget | 0-5 | 3 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Ambition, Scalability & Replicability** | Scalability and replication potential; market uptake and economic viability; potential economic and social impact; long-term benefits for primary producers and value chain resilience | 0-5 | 3 |
| **Climate Impact** | Potential climate impact; greenhouse gas emissions reduction potential; credibility of the baseline scenario and supporting assumptions | 0-5 | 3 |
| **TOTAL** | | **Max 25** | **Min 15** |

## 6.3 Evaluation Process

The evaluation process will be composed of subsequent activities, as follows:

1. **Eligibility and Admissibility Check**: Verification of compliance with admissibility and eligibility criteria (including legal status, consortium composition, single-submission rule, budget rules and limits, **and thematic scope alignment as defined in Section 4.2)**, involving all applications' components. This check is conducted by BIOECONOMY GIANTS consortium members, and only applications passing this check will proceed to the next step.
2. **Experts' Evaluation**: each application passing the eligibility check will be evaluated by 2 independent experts from the working group on primary producers, formed under the **ROOTLINKS project**, as follows:
   - **Part B (Technical Proposal) Evaluation**: the uploaded Part B will be evaluated against award criteria 1-4.
     - *Please note: While scoring is primarily based on Part B, evaluators may also consult **Part A** to verify consistency, applicant profiles, and the overall coherence of the consortium.*
   - **Impact pre-assessment evaluation**: the responses submitted via the online form will be evaluated against award criterion 5.
3. **Final score & Consensus**

The final score for each application is determined as follows:

- **Criterion and Total Scoring**: For each award criterion, the final score will be the mathematical average of the scores awarded by the two independent experts.
- **Consistent Overall Scores:** If both experts evaluate the proposal as passing (each awarding an overall score of 15/25 or higher) or both evaluate it as failing (each awarding an overall score strictly below 15/25), no consensus meeting is required; the final total score will simply be the mathematical average of the two scores.
- **Consensus Meeting**: A consensus meeting will be convened only if there is a divergence regarding the overall pass threshold (i.e. one expert awards a passing score of 15/25 or above and the other awards a failing score below 15/25), in order to discuss and agree on a definitive final score.

For each evaluated proposal, an Evaluation Summary Report (ESR) detailing the scores and feedback from the evaluation process will be sent to the contact person(s) indicated by the Lead Applicant in the application form.

Aggregated anonymised data on applications (e.g. distribution per country, per topic, etc.), as well as awarded proposals (proposal names only) will be made publicly available.

### 6.3.1 General rules for selection

- **Overall Threshold**: applicants must reach a minimum score awarded (15/25).
- **Knock-out Rule:** if the average score for any individual criterion is **below the minimum threshold** (score <3/5), the proposal will be **automatically rejected**, regardless of the total score (e.g., scoring the maximum in Implementation and Technical feasibility, but 2/5 in Consortium Capacity).

## 6.4 Ranking and shortlisting

### 6.4.1 Ranking process

At the end of the evaluation phase, a ranking list will be established by aggregating the final scores assigned to each eligible application. Applications will be ordered from the highest to the lowest score. The **top 4 ranked applications** will be officially contacted and invited to sign the Sub-Grant Agreement.

### 6.4.2 Reserve list and substitution

A reserve list (shortlist) will be established to ensure full budget absorption and maximise the call impact. In the event of:

- Official withdrawal by a selected consortium;
- Technical or administrative non-compliance identified during the contracting phase;
- Failure to respond to the formal invitation within the specified deadline;

the BIOECONOMY GIANTS consortium will proceed to invite consortia from the reserve list, following the established ranking order.

### 6.4.3 Priority in case of equal scores (Tie-break criteria)

In the event that two or more applications receive the same total score, the following sequential tie-break criteria will be applied to determine the final ranking:

1. **Primary producers' role:** Priority will be given to consortia with more than one primary producer actively involved in a supervisory or managerial position within the project.
2. **Score on Ambition, Scalability & Replicability:** Consortia that remain tied will be prioritized according to the score awarded under Criterion 4 (*Ambition, Scalability & Replicability*).
3. **Score on Implementation and Technical Feasibility:** If the tie persists, priority will be given based on the score awarded under Criterion 2 (*Implementation and Technical Feasibility*).
4. **Gender Balance:** If scores are still equal, priority will be given to applications demonstrating a better gender balance in supervisory and managerial positions within the proposed project.

# 7. OBLIGATIONS OF BENEFICIARIES

## 7.1 Sub-Grant Agreement

Selected applicants will sign:

- a **Sub-Grant Agreement** with **APRE (Agency for the Promotion of European Research)**, acting as the BIOECONOMY GIANTS Granting Authority.

The agreement shall be executed in simple written form and does not require notarisation or any equivalent formal certification. It may be signed electronically in accordance with EU eIDAS regulations, with electronic signatures having the same legal effect as handwritten signatures

## 7.2 Data Protection

Personal data will be processed in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR).

# 8. SUPPORT

For any questions regarding the call requirements or the submission process, please contact:

- **Information, details and FAQ page:** https://bioeconomygiants.com/open-call-2/
- **Email:** giantsopencall@apre.it

# BIOECONOMY GIANTS

FosterinG collaboratIon among primAry producers and beyoNd to promoTe Sustainable growth

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