

SME Instrument

Are you an innovative, high-flying small or medium-sized business with European and global ambitions? Are you looking for substantial funding to develop and scale up your idea? And could you make use of business development resources and coaching to take your company forward? Then the SME Instrument is for you. The SME Instrument is now part of the European Innovation Council (EIC) pilot that supports top-class innovators, entrepreneurs, small companies and scientists with funding opportunities and acceleration services. The main focus of the EIC pilot is on radical, market-creating innovations to improve productivity and international competitiveness and generate new jobs and higher standards of living.

* Who should apply?

The SME Instrument addresses small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with a radically new idea underpinned by a business plan for rolling out marketable innovation solutions and with ambitions to scale up. It supports high-risk, high-potential SMEs to develop and bring to market new products, services and business models that could drive economic growth.

The SME Instrument is designed for For-profit SMEs, including young companies and start-ups, from any sector. You must be established in an EU Member State or a Horizon 2020 associated country. Not sure you fit the bill? Try out the EIC wizard [5] to see which innovation funding instrument suits you the best. Also have a look the EU definition of SMEs.

Competition is tough - only the most convincing and excellent proposals get funded after a thorough valuation by multinational panels of technology, business and finance experts. Selected companies receive funding and are offered business coaching to scale up their innovation idea, and can also receive mentoring. They are helped in networking with other EIC SME Instrument clients, with other companies of all sizes, and with potential co-investors and follow-up investors across Europe. Until 2020 around 4000 small companies will be selected for funding.

As an SME Instrument client, you will gain visibility and boost your chances of success in European and international markets.

* What support can you get?

The SME Instrument provides full-cycle business innovation support. It has three phases, including a coaching and mentoring service. There are no set topics - innovative companies across the board are welcome to submit their bright ideas. Companies are recommended to apply for Phase 1 first, but may also apply directly for Phase 2 depending on the maturity of their project.

Feasibility study - Phase 1 *

Phase 1 helps you get a grip on the R&D, technical feasibility and commercial potential of a groundbreaking, innovative idea and develop it into a credible business plan for scaling it up. Projects will receive a lump sum of €50 000 and should last around 6 months.

From concept to market - Phase 2 *

Phase 2 helps you develop your business concept further into a market-ready product, service or process aligned with your company's growth strategy. Activities could, for example, include trials, prototyping, validation, demonstration and testing in real-world conditions, and market replication. If the activity concerns a primarily technological innovation, a Technology Readiness Level (TRL) of 6 or above is envisaged. Projects will receive between € 0.5 and € 2.5 million but you can request a higher or lower amount, duly justified, when applying. Projects should normally take 12 to 24 months to complete, but could be longer in exceptional and well-justified cases.

Business acceleration services and coaching - Phase 3 *

The EIC pilot offers free coaching, business acceleration services and mentoring to help your business scale up and grow. These are open to all small businesses that are EIC clients, simultaneously to their grant.

Coaching covers business development, organisational development, cooperation, and financing. For SME Instrument clients, up to 3 coaching-days are available in Phase 1, and up to 12 coachingdays in Phase 2. SMEs taking part in FTI or FET-Open are offered up to 12 coaching-days.

Business acceleration services are offered in the form of training, links to investors, partnering and networking with other SME clients and larger firms and services to help you access international markets, e.g. via participation in overseas trade fairs. The free-of-charge coaching service is facilitated by the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN).

* How to apply?

The SME Instrument is a continuously open call with 4 cut-offs per year for each Phase. Proposals are evaluated by experts on the basis of three award criteria: 'impact', 'excellence', and 'quality and efficiency of implementation'.

For Phase 1 proposals are evaluated remotely by independent experts. Proposals that pass the quality threshold of 13 out of 15 will be considered for funding to the extent of budget available.

For Phase 2 applications are evaluated in two steps. In Step 1 proposals are evaluated remotely by independent experts. Proposals that pass the quality threshold rank the highest will be invited for Step 2 (approximately the double of proposals than the budget available will be invited for Step 2). The second step consists of panel interviews with a jury of experts in technology, business, finance and industry.

For full details about submissions, eligibility and admissibility criteria and the evaluation procedure read the guidelines for applicants.

* Apply now

Phases Cut-off dates

SME 1
08 February 2018
03 May 2018
05 September 2018
07 November 2018
13 February 2019
07 May 2019

05 September 2019
06 November 2019
12 February 2020
06 May 2020
02 September 2020
04 November 2020

Phase 2
10 January 2018
14 March 2018
23 May 2018
10 October 2018
09 January 2019

03 April 2019
05 June 2019
09 October 2019
08 January 2020
18 March 2020
19 May 2020
07 October 2020

These dates are indicative and may change.

The indicative budget from 2018 to 2020 for the SME Instrument is as follows:

indicative budget	2018	2019	2020
Overall yearly budget	€479.74 million	€552.26 million	€600.99 million
Phase 1	10%	10%	10%
Phase 2	87%	87%	87%
Phase 3	1%	1%	1%
Coaching and mentoring	1%	1%	1%
Evaluation	1%	1%	1%

Results

Information about the outcome of the evaluation: Maximum 2 months after the corresponding cut-off date set out above for phase 1 and maximum 4 months after the corresponding cut-off date set out above for phase 2. Indicative date for the signing of grant agreements:

Maximum 3 months from the final date for submission in phase 1 and maximum 6 months from the final date for submission in phase 2.

Not the right match for your innovation? Try out the other innovation funding instruments under the EIC: Fast Track to Innovation (FTI), Future and Emerging Technologies (FET)-Open and Horizon Prizes.

Source:

<http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/h2020-section/sme-instrument>