

DEEPACT call for Expression of Interest – Cut-off 3

Foreword

The Fondazione LINKS (hereinafter also referred to as “LINKS”) was established in Torino (Italy) from the will of Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo – Italy's largest banking foundation – and Politecnico di Torino – a prestigious technological university of international standing – to create a bridge between basic research and the market, working in applied research, innovation and technology transfer (www.linksfoundation.com).

LINKS has been operating for about 20 years at national and international level and was formed by the merger of two historical research institutes, the Istituto Superiore Mario Boella (ISMB) and the Istituto per i Sistemi Territoriali Innovativi (SiTI).

Strengthened by the collaboration of around 200 researchers, LINKS oversees technical and scientific disciplines in the fields of digital technologies and territorial development, such as Artificial Intelligence, connected systems and the Internet of Things, cybersecurity, advanced computing systems and satellite systems, to realise innovative projects in various application sectors: Industry 4.0, Intelligent Mobility, Agritech, Space Economy, Smart Infrastructures and Cultural Heritage.

LINKS aims at promoting, guiding and enhancing innovation processes through research projects with strong innovation potential, capable of creating an impact on the productive and public sector and confronting an international context.

LINKS accelerates competitiveness by working with both large multinational companies and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with a strong innovative vocation, but also aims to “accelerate the common good” in partnerships with public bodies, intermediary bodies, non-profit organisations and cultural institutions.

LINKS boasts multiple collaborations with national and international Universities and Research Centres, a strong project capability in the field of European research, and has close relations with the business world.

Background, objectives and contents of the DEEPACT initiative

According to the broad spectrum of 32 reference indicators defined at European level, Italy is a Moderate Innovator, with a national innovation performance below the European average¹.

The European Union actively supports innovation in the Member States through the four competitive funding programmes promoted by the **European Innovation Council (EIC)** and particularly targeted at so-called “Deep Tech Innovation”:

- EIC Pathfinder, which supports the early stages of development of innovative technological solutions up to Technology Readiness Level (TRL) 4;
- EIC Transition, which supports technology maturation, from TRL 4 to TRL 6, and market validation;
- EIC Accelerator, which supports SMEs and start-ups in scaling up innovations with the potential to establish themselves in the market from TRL 6 to TRL 8 and, potentially, TRL 9.
- EIC STEP Scale Up, which supports start-ups, SMEs and small mid-caps that have already secured initial funding rounds in developing and manufacturing game-changing innovations in critical technologies.

¹ https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/statistics/performance-indicators/european-innovation-scoreboard_en





In recent years, LINKS has undertaken specific actions in synergy with its Founders – Politecnico di Torino and Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo – aimed at improving the Territory's performance on low-to-medium TRL EIC programmes; namely, the EIC Pathfinder and EIC Transition.

To complete this process, LINKS has decided to promote the present initiative, **DEEPACT (High Impact ACTION to Accelerate DEEP Tech Ecosystems)**, dedicated to the high-TRL EIC programmes; namely, **EIC Accelerator** and **EIC STEP Scale Up**.

With DEEPACT, LINKS aims to improve the strategic positioning of its ecosystem on the world map of innovation ecosystems by offering Deep Tech SMEs in its network (in particular, start-ups, spin-outs and spin-offs) a **support service** in the preparation of strong applications to be submitted to the EIC Accelerator or EIC STEP Scale Up programmes.

The Deep Tech SMEs to be offered support service (hereinafter referred to as “selected SME” or “accompanied SME”) will be **selected** from those that **submit an application to this Call for Expressions of Interest** (hereinafter referred to as “DEEPACT Call”) and demonstrate that they have the potential to successfully participate in the EIC Accelerator or EIC STEP Scale Up programmes.

Taking as a reference the Work Programme 2025 of the EIC, the process to apply to **the EIC Accelerator** is composed of the following 3 steps:

- a) Step 1: submission of a Short Application (SA) to the EIC at any time
- b) Step 2: following a positive evaluation of the SA by the EIC, submission of a Full Application (FA) by a given cut-off date²
- c) Step 3: following a positive evaluation of the FA by the EIC, face-to-face interview (F2F) with the EIC Jury Members

The **EIC STEP Scale Up** application process is similar to the EIC Accelerator process, without Step 1.

The support service offered by the DEEPACT programme **covers the entire EIC Accelerator or EIC STEP Scale Up application processes**. Should the 2026 EIC Work Programme provide for different application processes, the support service offered by DEEPACT will be redesigned to include accompaniment through all steps of such application processes.

The support service will extend until the completion of the entire application process initiated by an **application submitted to the EIC within 2026**.

The support service will be offered to the selected SMEs **free of charge** and will be provided by one of the **Service Providers** selected by Fondazione LINKS among the most successful companies in Europe, specialised in assisting SMEs in the preparation of EIC Accelerator applications. These Service Providers will also be involved in the evaluation of applications received to this DEEPACT Call.

Based on the project-specific information provided by the accompanied SME, the Service Provider is primarily responsible for drafting the applications to be submitted to the EIC, as well as, for intensively training the accompanied SME in preparation for the F2F.

In case of success and the signing of a contract between the accompanied SME and the EIC, the Service Provider may request a **success fee** on the EIC grant and/or on the equity³ received by the accompanied SME. Negotiation of such success fee will have to take place bilaterally between the Service Provider and the accompanied SME prior the beginning of the support service, and it is outside the scope of the DEEPACT Programme.

² In 2025, the EIC Accelerator cut-off dates are 12 March 2025 and 1 October 2025. The 2026 cut-off dates will be published with the 2026 EIC Work Programme.

³ According to the 2025 EIC Work Programme, 2025 applicants to the EIC Accelerator may request financial support from the EIC in terms of grant ('grant only' option), equity ('investment only' option) or both ('blended finance' option), while applicants to the EIC STEP Scale Up can receive financial support only through equity. Further details on the EIC Accelerator and EIC STEP Scale Up programmes can be found here: <https://eic.ec.europa.eu/eic-funding-opportunities>.





Eligibility

Given the nature of the initiative, DEEPACT beneficiaries must necessarily meet the eligibility requirements defined by the EIC Accelerator and EIC STEP Scale Up programmes (please refer to the EIC Work Programme for further details).

In particular, they must meet the EU definition of an **SME** (< 250 employees, < €50 million turnover or < €43 million total balance sheet) and be based in an EU Member Country or an Associated Country.

In addition, to be eligible for DEEPACT support, the **SMEs must have entered the extended innovation ecosystem in which LINKS operates from 2019 to date** as:

- established as an academic **spin-off** of **Politecnico di Torino** or by one of the other **universities in agreement with Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo** (Università degli Studi di Torino, Università del Piemonte Orientale, Università di Genova, Università Federico II di Napoli)
- beneficiaries of an **incubation programme** provided by university incubators participated by LINKS (**I3P** of Politecnico di Torino and **2i3T** of Università degli Studi di Torino) or linked to other **universities in agreement with the Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo** (Enne3, BIC Incubatore di Imprese FILSE, Campania NewSteel);
- subject of **investments made by LIFTT SpA**;
- subject of **investments made by companies participated by the Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo** (e.g. Equiter - through RIF, RIF-T S.p.A. and Equiter Venture - Club Acceleratori S.p.A.) or **by VC funds subscribed by Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo and placed in the Innovation & Research section of the so-called Mission Related Investments** (e.g., Sofinnova-Telethon Fund, United Ventures II Fund, Primo Space Fund, Eureka! Fund I - Technology Transfer, Claris Biotech I Fund, Neva First Fund, P103 Fund);
- participants in **acceleration programmes linked to LINKS** (e.g., ESA BIC Turin) or forming **part of the Accelerator Platform of Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo** (e.g., Techstars Smart Mobility Accelerator, Torino Cities of the Future Techstars Accelerator, Techstars Transformative World Torino, Magic Spectrum, Magic Mind, Personae);
- object of investment by one of the **National Technology Transfer Poles of the Cassa Depositi e Prestiti network linked to Politecnico di Torino and other universities in agreement with Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo** (e.g., Galaxia, Tech4Planet, RoboIT, Farming Future);
- set up in the framework of **venture building programmes supported by Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo** (e.g., Vento)
- supported by **ESCP Blue Factory** – through the START+, SEED and SCALE programmes – within the **Turin campus**;
- supported by **Entopan Innovation** in its usual institutional action

Modalities of participation and deadlines

SMEs applying to this DEEPACT Call shall send to DEEPACT@linksfoundation.com an **Expression of Interest** including:

- a **short proposal** following the template described in Annex A, including a cover letter dated and signed by the Legal Representative and addressed to:

Fondazione LINKS
Via Pier Carlo Boggio, 61
10138 Turin
C. F. 97810470019

- a **pitch deck** of no more than 10 slides in English and in pdf format

Compressed attachments, WeTransfer, etc. are accepted.





Applications for the DEEPACT call for proposals can be submitted at any time. On the **cut-off dates** set by DEEPACT, the applications received up to that point will be evaluated to select the SMEs to be offered the DEEPACT support service.

Information on DEEPACT Call cut-offs are published at <https://linksfoundation.com/deepact/>

Evaluation of expressions of interest and admission to the DEEPACT Programme

Once the eligibility requirements of the applications have been verified, the evaluation of the expressions of interest will be carried out with the assistance of the Service Providers appointed by LINKS.

Participation in the Call implies acceptance of the irrevocability of LINKS' decisions regarding the selection of the SMEs to be accompanied.

During the evaluation phase, LINKS reserves the right to request additional documentation, as well as, to conduct verifications and in-depth meetings with participants in order to receive clarifications on the application.

In case of positive evaluation of its expression of interest, the SME will be invited to join the DEEPACT Programme. However, in order to be admitted to DEEPACT, the SME will have to agree bilaterally with the Service Provider assigned by LINKS on terms and conditions of the accompaniment service, including the success fee that the Service Provider may request if a successful application to the EIC leads to signing a contract between the SME and the EIC. Reaching the agreement with the Service Provider **within a deadline defined by DEEPACT** is a **precondition** for the SME to be admitted to the DEEPACT Programme and failure to do so will result in the **exclusion** of the SME from the DEEPACT Programme.

Contacts

For any request for additional information and/or need for clarification on to this Call, please refer to: DEEPACT@linksfoundation.com.

Confidentiality

The participant in this Call

- undertakes to maintain the utmost confidentiality on the information received in the course of the selection procedure and not to use or disclose the information and data of which it becomes aware
- guarantees, also in compliance with the provisions of the law, the utmost confidentiality and protection of the data and documents processed for the purposes of this selection procedure
- guarantees the utmost confidentiality and protection of the data contained in its files, the data processed and the documents and information received;
- undertakes to enforce the confidentiality obligations of its employees, collaborators and any third parties involved in the processing of the proposal;
- acknowledges and expressly accepts all terms and conditions indicated in this Call, including the fact that the Call is non-binding for LINKS, which reserves the right, at its sole discretion, not to proceed with the selection, even in the presence of valid applications, without this entailing any right, not even by way of reimbursement of expenses, for the participants and that, in any event, the adequacy of the proposals and their selection shall be evaluated at the sole discretion of LINKS.

Annexes

- Annex A – DEEPACT Short Proposal Template

