

STAIRwAI

Stairway to AI: Ease the Engagement of Low-Tech users to the AI-on-Demand platform through AI, H2020

Third Call Announcement and Guide for Applicants

Deliverable information	
Deliverable number	D7.3
WP number and title	WP7 "Open Call Management"
Lead beneficiary	FBA
Dissemination level	Public
Due date	28 February 2023
Actual date of delivery	28 February 2023
Author(s)	Urszula Sobek (FBA), Weronika Gasior (FBA), Elena Japundzic (FBA)
Contributors	All partners
Deliverable reviewers	All partners



Document Control Sheet

Version	Date	Summary of changes	Author(s)
0.1	20 February 2023	Final	FBA



Table of contents

1. StairwAI – basic info	4
2. Content of the document	4
2.1. Annex 1 - StairwAI Open Call for Pilots - CALL ANNOUNCEMENT	5
2.2. Annex 2 - Guide for Applicants (GfA), StairwAI 2nd Open Call for Pilots	7
1. Basic Info about StairwAI	9
2. What do we offer?	9
3. Eligibility Criteria	10
3.1 Who are we looking for?	10
3.2 What types of activities can be funded?	11
3.3 Ideal Project	14
3.4 How to apply?	14
4. How will we evaluate your proposal?	16
Figure 1 Selection Procedure	16
4.1 Step 1: First Eligibility Check	16
4.2 Step 2: Pre-scoring	17
4.3 Step 3: External Evaluation	18
4.4 Step 4: Consensus Meeting	20
4.5 Step 5: Subgrant Agreement Preparation and Signature	21
5. Our Support Programme and Payment Arrangements	21
6. Contact us	23
7. Last but not least - final provisions	24
8. Extra hints before submitting your proposal	24



1. StairwAI – basic info

StairwAI (Stairway to AI: Ease the Engagement of Low-Tech users to the AI-on-Demand platform through AI) is an EU-funded project targeting low-tech users with the goal of facilitating their engagement in the AI-on-Demand platform. This will be achieved through a new service layer enriching the functionalities of the on-demand platform.

To test the above-mentioned new services, StairwAI will target low-tech SMEs that do not have immediate access nor knowledge on AI techniques, matching them with cloud providers and AI experts.

2. Content of the document

The Third Open Calls Documents Package includes the Call announcement published in the Participant Portal a month before launching the StairwAI 3rd Open Call - Call for Adopters and the Guide for Applicants detailing the process, evaluation, support program and distribution of the funding.



2.1. Annex 1 - StairwAI Open Call for Adopters - CALL ANNOUNCEMENT



Grant Agreement N° 101017142



StairwAI Open Call for Adopters - CALL ANNOUNCEMENT

Call title:	StairwAI Open Call for Adopters
Full name of the EU funded project:	Stairway to AI: Ease the Engagement of Low-Tech users to the AI-on-Demand platform through AI
Project acronym:	StairwAI
Grant agreement number:	101017142
Call publication date:	23 February 2023 at 13:00 CET (Brussels Time)
Call deadline:	25 April 2023 at 13:00 CEST (Brussels Time)
Expected duration of participation:	Up to 2 months
Total EU funding available:	€320.000 (up to € 10.000 per SME)
Submission & evaluation process:	<p>Submission through the application form available on: https://stairwai-3rd-open-call.fundingbox.com/</p> <p>The selection of the Open Call proposals will be carried out in a five-step process.</p> <p>Step 1 will check the proposals against eligibility criteria</p> <p>Step 2 (optional) will pre-select the best proposals based on pre-scoring criteria</p> <p>Step 3 will involve external evaluation to assess the proposal according to the criteria.</p> <p>Step 4 will involve the StairwAI consortium to choose the proposals based on the external evaluation results and the objectives of the StairwAI project during a consensus meeting.</p> <p>Step 5 will include the review of legal documents before the Sub Grant Agreement signature.</p> <p>For further information see the Guide of Applicants section 4.</p>
Further information:	<p>Application form: https://stairwai-3rd-open-call.fundingbox.com/</p> <p>OC helpdesk email: info.stairwai@fundingbox.com</p> <p>Project website: https://stairwai.nws.cs.unibo.it/</p>
Task description:	StairwAI will select up to 32 low-tech SMEs to perform a feasibility study for the adoption of AI. Applicants have to focus



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101017142

	<p>on addressing one of the challenge areas using a set of AI tools and resources that will be available on the AI-on-Demand platform.</p> <p>The call is open for low-tech SMEs (registered as legal entities) established in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Member States of the European Union and its Overseas Countries and Territories (OCT) or • Associated Countries to H2020, • The United Kingdom. <p>Applicants must address at least one of the challenge areas described in the Guide for Applicants, section 3.2.</p> <p>What StairwAI offers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial support (up to € 10.000) • Support from Technical Mentor with a wide background in AI and knowledge of technologies offered within the project, • Support from Business Mentor to help define the Business Model and the Exploitation Plan for market deployment, <p>Entities funded under the 1st and 2nd StairwAI Open Call for Pilots cannot receive any support (financial or non-financial) under this open call.</p>
--	---

About StairwAI:

StairwAI ([Stairway to AI: Ease the Engagement of Low-Tech users to the AI-on-Demand platform through AI](#)) is an EU-funded project targeting low-tech users with the goal of facilitating their engagement in the [AI-on-Demand Platform](#). This will be achieved through a new service layer enriching the functionalities of the on-demand platform and containing:

- a multilingual interaction layer
- a horizontal matchmaking service and
- a vertical matchmaking service

To test the above-mentioned new services, StairwAI is targeting SMEs working in low-tech sectors that do not have immediate access nor knowledge on AI techniques, matching them with cloud providers and AI experts.

StairwAI will select **up to 32 low-tech SMEs** to perform a **feasibility study** for the adoption of AI. Applicants have to focus on addressing one of the **challenge areas** using a set of **AI tools and resources** that will be available on the [AI-on-demand Platform](#).

What do we offer?

- Financial support (up to **€ 10.000**)
- Support from Technical Mentor with a wide background in AI and knowledge of technologies offered within the project,
- Support from Business Mentor to help define the Business Model and the Exploitation Plan for market deployment.



2.2. Annex 2 - Guide for Applicants (GfA), StairwAI 2nd Open Call for Pilots



Guide for Applicants (GfA) StairwAI Call for Adopters

Open date for proposals: 23 February 2023 at 13:00 CET
(Brussels Time)

Deadline: 25 April 2023 at 13:00 CEST (Brussels Time)



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement 101017142.



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101017142

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

1. Basic Info about StairwAI	4
2. What do we offer?	5
3. Eligibility Criteria	5
3.1 Who are we looking for?	5
3.2 What types of activities can be funded?	6
3.3 Ideal Project	9
3.4 How to apply?	10
4. How will we evaluate your proposal?	12
Figure 1 Selection Procedure	12
4.1 Step 1: First Eligibility Check	12
4.2 Step 2: Pre-scoring	13
4.3 Step 3: External Evaluation	14
4.4 Step 4: Consensus Meeting	16
4.5 Step 5: Subgrant Agreement Preparation and Signature	17
5. Our Support Programme and Payment Arrangements	18
6. Contact us	19
7. Last but not least - final provisions	20
8. Extra hints before submitting your proposal	21
Annex 1: Information Clause	22

List of acronyms

AI: Artificial Intelligence

EC: European Commission

EoI: Expressions of Interest

FSTP: Financial Support for Third Parties

DoA: Description of Action

GA: Grant Agreement

HPC: High-Performance Computing

SME: Small and Medium Enterprise



1. Basic Info about StairwAI

StairwAI (*[Stairway to AI: Ease the Engagement of Low-Tech users to the AI-on-Demand platform through AI](#)*) is an EU-funded project targeting low-tech users with the goal of facilitating their engagement in the [AI-on-Demand Platform](#). This will be achieved through a new service layer enriching the functionalities of the on-demand platform and containing:

- a **multilingual interaction layer** enabling conversations with the Platform in the user's own language,
- a **horizontal matchmaking service** for the automatic discovery of AI assets (tools, data sets, AI experts, consultants, papers, courses etc.) meeting the user business needs and
- a **vertical matchmaking service** that will dimension and provision hardware resources through a proper hardware provider (HPC, Cloud and Edge infrastructures).

To test the above-mentioned new services, StairwAI will target low-tech SMEs that do not have immediate access nor knowledge on AI techniques, matching them with cloud providers and AI experts.

The StairwAI project is coordinated by UNIBO (ALMA MATER STUDIORUM – UNIVERSITA DI BOLOGNA) and involves [11 partners](#) from nine EU countries.

This document summarizes the main points of the Open Call for Adopters under the StairwAI project, which will be **open from 23 February 2023 at 13:00 CET (Brussels Time) with a deadline on 25 April 2023 at 13:00 CEST (Brussels Time)**.

Where can you find key information regarding this Open Call?

- [StairwAI](#) website for general information about the program,
- If you have any technical problems or doubt when filling in the online Application Form at FundingBox, tell us directly at: info.stairwai@fundingbox.com
- Application website, <https://stairwai-3rd-open-call.fundingbox.com/>

StairwAI planned a certain number of online webinars about this open call. They will be announced at the StairwAI social media

2. What do we offer?

StairwAI will select **32 low-tech SMEs** to perform a **feasibility study** for the adoption of AI. Applicants **have to focus on addressing one of the challenge areas** (described in Section 3.2) **using a set of AI tools and resources that will be available on the AI-on-Demand platform¹**.

¹ Other AI tools can be also used in case the necessary resources will not be available on the AI-on-Demand platform



Selected companies will receive a maximum fixed lump-sum of **€ 10.000** and will participate in the 2-month support program to define the feasibility plan for the adoption of AI.

Apply here: <https://stairwai-3rd-open-call.fundingbox.com/>

3. Eligibility Criteria

We will check the eligibility of all proposals submitted by the deadline via our online application form (<https://stairwai-3rd-open-call.fundingbox.com/>). All the eligibility criteria are listed in this Section of this Guide for Applicants. The projects that do not comply with those criteria will be excluded and marked as ineligible. We will check the eligibility criteria based on the information provided in your application and during the whole evaluation process.

3.1 Who are we looking for?

We are looking for **low-tech* SMEs²** established in:

- [The Member States of the European Union and its Overseas Countries and Territories \(OCT\)](#) or
- [Associated Countries to H2020](#),
- The United Kingdom.

Applicants, at the moment of applying, must be officially registered legal entities.

Entities funded under the 1st and 2nd StairwAI Open Call for Pilots cannot receive any support (financial nor non-financial) under this open call.

*What are low-tech companies?

For the purpose of StairwAI Open Call, **the low-tech SMEs** are considered to be companies (SMEs) with AI Readiness Index (AIRI) below or equal to 2.0 (classified as AI Unaware or AI Aware). For StairwAI applicants the AI Readiness Index (AIRI) will be calculated based on methodology and survey developed by [AI SINGAPORE](#) and adjusted to the StairwAI project. We will measure your AIRI based on the 6 questions included in the application form.

In the table below you will find more information about the AIRI and features of low-tech companies. For more details, please check the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) document.

² An **SME** will be considered as such if it complies with the European Commission's Recommendation 2003/361/EC. As a summary, the criteria defining an SME are:

- Headcount in Annual Work Unit (AWU) less than 250;
- Annual turnover less or equal to €50 million OR annual balance sheet total less or equal to €43 million.

Note that the figures of partners and linked enterprises should also be considered as stated in the SME user guide. For detailed information check EU recommendation:

https://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/business-friendly-environment/sme-definition_en



	AI Unaware	AI Aware	AI Ready	AI Competent
AI Maturity Index (AIRI)	Less than 1	1 to 2	From 2 to 2,5	More than 2,5
General Capabilities	Might hear about AI but is unaware of applications	Savvy consumers of AI solutions. Capable of identifying use cases for AI applications	Capable of integrating pre-trained AI model into products of business processes	Capable of developing customized AI solutions for specific business needs
General Characteristics	Wait for vendors to convince use cases and business value of AI	Identified potential use cases and seek AI solutions from vendors	Evaluated viability of pre-trained AI models	Developed roadmap for AI implementation
AI Adoption Suitability	Consume ready-made, end-to-end AI solutions		Integrate pre-trained AI models and solutions for common AI applications	Develop customized AI model for unique business needs
	Low - Tech		Medium to High Tech	

Table 1: AIRI classification

3.2 What types of activities can be funded?

StairwAI is looking for projects that address **testing, validating and feasibility assessment of AI resources** offered by StairwAI to improve low-tech SMEs' products, services or value chains. SMEs have to focus on **solving a specific challenge** using a set of AI tools and resources that are available as a service layer of the [AI-on-Demand Platform](#).

What are the challenge areas to be addressed by SMEs?

Challenge 1: Logistic and supply chains

AI can provide support in logistics and control over the supply chains from capacity planning to inventory tracking and management. Applicants to this challenge are expected to develop and pilot the solutions for the management of logistics and supply chains, with a special focus on the following aspects: improvement of the efficiency of decision support systems and predictive models, optimizing supply chains, inventory management, and loss reduction, forecasting demand and ordering goods more precisely. Foremost among these topics are - but not limited to - management of deliveries and stock management. It's mandatory that the solution is based on the implementation of AI assets.

Challenge 2: Human resources

Applicants must focus on improving the HR processes for low-tech industries by incorporating the AI mechanisms. It is important to pay particular attention to ethical aspects in HR processes, fairness in particular. It is quite often the case that existing HR support tools are biased, often preferring curricula despite gender, age and race balance.

Challenge 3: Management of data generated by the Internet of things (IoT)



Applicants to this challenge should focus on the use of artificial intelligence algorithms to organize, integrate, analyze and use IoT devices effectively for industry or public bodies. In addition, the use of AI techniques that can help to collect and process this huge amount of operational data by offering tailored, real-time recommendations to improve equipment performance. Applications will be prioritised also based on their digitalisation indicator with respect to their capabilities to embrace AI once they are on Industry 4.0.

Challenge 4: Manufacturing Industry

In manufacturing, AI can offer value in production operations, maintenance and planning. Applicants to this challenge should provide use cases addressing the following aspects of the manufacturing industry:

- Detecting quality defects – Applicants should provide solutions based on machine vision to identify defects in products. These are essential for improving production but also to reducing waste and better alignment of supply chain processes.
- Facilitate predictive maintenance - Applicants are required to use AI that gathers data from industry for maintenance of machinery or other company assets. Solutions based on learning models can help predict the probability of fault or the time to fault and solutions using optimization algorithms can provide optimal maintenance plans.

It's mandatory that the solution is based on the implementation of AI assets.

Challenge 5: Environmental issues

Environmental degradation and the consequences of this phenomenon are currently one of the greatest challenges facing governments around the world, and so do all of us. At the same time, companies from low-tech sectors face barriers in the field of implementing modern pro-environmental solutions. AI is well known by manufacturers as a tool to improve efficiency, reducing energy consumption. Applicants must provide new approaches which can be used in environments to save resources/energy and that reduce the carbon footprint of the production process. It's mandatory that the solution is based on the implementation of AI assets.

Challenge 6: Cyber Security

Applicants to this challenge must provide solutions based on AI that allows them to identify weaknesses, check procedures and effectively protect companies for the future. The detection of vulnerabilities is crucial for the industry but also for state authorities. Topics could include reduction of incidents, exposure of cyberattacks, detecting weaknesses, and minimizing consequences of cyberattacks.

Challenge 7: Health

Applicants to this challenge must provide solutions based on AI that address a human health issue. Major drivers in this area include medical data analysis, biomedical imaging, drug discovery clinical decision support, medical treatments, and therapeutic interventions in personalized medicine,



which jointly constitute promising and impactful application domains of AI. It's mandatory that the solution is based on the implementation of AI assets.

Challenge 8: Education

AI is increasingly becoming one of the disruptive factors in the educational area. Applicants to this challenge must provide solutions based on AI that support filling skill gaps by integrating, upskilling and reskilling, matching the right talent to the right roles, ensuring faster knowledge acquisition and improving learning outcomes, measuring the effectiveness of training programs and forecasting future learning outcomes and potential problems. It's mandatory that the solution is based on the implementation of AI assets.

Challenge 9: Energy

Applicants to this challenge must provide solutions based on AI that apply to the energy sector, with a special focus on data digitization (collection, storage, and management), resource management, energy storage facilitation, failure prediction and prevention. AI solutions proposed under this challenge should help the energy industry get more competitive under the conditions of an unstable economy and develop better operational methods than those currently available. It's mandatory that the solution is based on the implementation of AI assets.

Challenge 10: Art-driven solution and art production

Artists are among the many professions that are embracing artificial intelligence. The art-driven solutions can change the way how the different industries are operating. Under this challenge, we are looking for art-driven solutions that involve AI or solutions that can be applied by artists to their work (in wide term). It's mandatory that the solution is based on the implementation of AI assets.

Challenge 11: Public services

In the government and public services industry, there is growing interest in the use of AI to support the re-design of internal processes of public administrations and policy-making mechanisms designed to improve the quality of public services and engagement with citizens.

AI holds the potential to improve government operations and help meet the needs of citizens in new ways, ranging from traffic management to processing tax forms.

The applicants to this challenge should propose solutions that help public servants improve their processes, especially in the following areas: digitizing paper documents and accelerating processing, improving citizens' quality of life and safety, civil asset and infrastructure management, improving the speed and quality of service delivery, identifying patterns, impacts, and mitigation options for challenges related to public health and climate changes.

It's mandatory that the solution is based on the implementation of AI assets.

Challenge 12: Other



Under this challenge, we are looking for solutions addressing different major open challenges that AI can help to solve, not listed above. It's mandatory that the solution is based on the implementation of AI assets.

3.3 Ideal Project

The ideal project is a **use case of the adoption of AI resources available on the AI-on-Demand Platform** by the low-tech SME. The use case has to address one of the challenges (listed above) and should focus on the **preparation of the feasibility plan** for the adoption of AI (with support from StairwAI Consortium).

Ideal project example:

Transportes Torr  is a freight transport SME based in Valencia and Galicia, Spain. They have been dedicated to transporting goods by road since the beginning of the 20th century. They have a truck fleet that needs to be maintained continuously. Transportes Torr  applies to the Call for Adopters to improve the maintenance of their vehicles using predictive maintenance based on AI (addressing Challenge 4: Predictive maintenance). Transportes Torr  is selected as FSTP Beneficiary and signs the agreement to be part of the support program.

Transportes Torr  with support from business and technical mentors prepares the feasibility study for AI adoption (including technical and business aspects). The feasibility plan includes the identification of AI resources available on the AI-on-Demand Platform (previously AI4EU) that can be used for performing the implementation. StairwAI will also suggest the list of AI experts and HW resource providers for project implementation, using the matchmaking tools developed by the StairwAI consortium.

The Transportes Torr  can use the feasibility plan to implement AI in cooperation with experts and resources identified by StairwAI or as a reliable starting point in applying for additional funding for AI implementation.

It is expected that the initial TRL³ level will be TRL5 and beyond.

3.4 How to apply?

We know it. Applying to an Open Call takes time and dedication and we are grateful you take up the challenge of applying to the StairwAI Open Call. Because we care, we would like to make sure you understand what are some of the eligibility requirements with which you have to comply.

³ TRL, Technology Readiness Level. Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) are indicators of the maturity level of particular technologies. This measurement system provides a common understanding of technology status and addresses the entire innovation chain. There are nine technology readiness levels; TRL 1 being the lowest and TRL 9 the highest. In our project we refer to [Annex G of the General Annexes](#) to the Work Programme 2016/17 for a full description of TRLs.



- **Have a European dimension:** your proposal should have a clear European dimension meaning that the challenge is to fully exploit the potential of the European economy and society. Building notably on Europe's Scientific and Technology strengths in the field. The supported activities should reinforce industrial competitiveness across low tech SMEs and help address societal challenges. The ambition is to bring AI technologies and resources to integrators and innovators in low tech sectors and actively engage with a wide user community, to foster adoption of AI, via Use Case projects.
- **Be on time:** Make sure you submit your proposal through the online form <https://stairwai-3rd-open-call.fundingbox.com/> before the **deadline** (Deadline: 25 April 2023, 13:00 CEST). If you submit the form correctly, the system will send you a confirmation of your submission. Get in touch with us if it is not the case. It is important for you to know that we will not be evaluating any proposal sent after the deadline and submitted outside the dedicated form.
- **Be exhaustive:** Have you answered all the sections of the form? It won't be possible to add any information after the deadline. However, you will be able to modify the form as much as you like even *after* the proposal is submitted, **as long as it is done before the deadline**.
- **Less is more:** If more than one proposal submitted by the same entity is identified, only the last proposal which has been submitted will be evaluated. So no point multiplying your chances this way, it is better to submit only one proposal and make it shine. Moreover, if you've already received funding from StairwAI under the 1st and 2nd Open Call for Pilots, you are not eligible to be funded in this Open call.
- Your proposal must be written in **English** in all mandatory parts in order to be eligible. Only parts written in English will be evaluated.
- **Every question deserves your attention:** all mandatory sections of your proposal - generally marked with an asterisk - must be filled in. Make sure that the data provided is true and complete. This is crucial for us to properly assess your proposal. Conversely, any additional material that is not specifically requested in the online application form will not be considered for the evaluation, so no point overdoing it.
- **Conflicts of interest:** we will take into consideration the existence of a potential **conflict of interest** between you and one or more StairwAI Consortium partners. Indeed, consortium partners, their affiliated entities, employees, their board members and permanent collaborators cannot take part in the StairwAI programme. All cases of potential conflict of interest will be assessed case by case.
- **Healthy finances and a clean sheet are a must:** we won't accept entities that are under liquidation or enterprises in difficulty according to the Commission Regulation No



651/2014, art. 2.18. Neither will we accept proposals from entities that are excluded from the possibility of obtaining EU funding under the provisions of both national and EU law, or by a decision of both national or EU authority.

- **It is *your* proposal:** your project should be based on your original work. If not, that's okay, just make sure your right to use the IPR is 100% certain. Going forward, any foreseen developments must be free from third-party rights and if not, these third-party rights must be clearly stated.

4. How will we evaluate your proposal?

Our evaluation process is transparent, fair and equal to all our applicants.

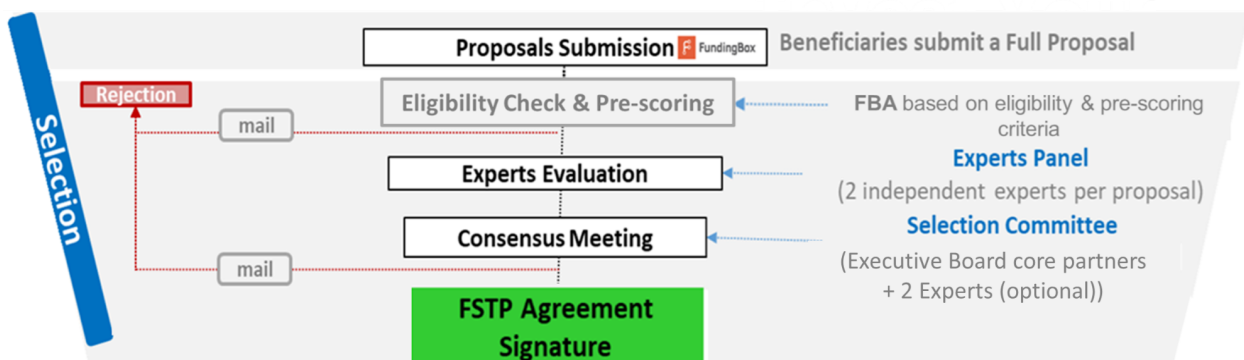


Figure 1 Selection Procedure

Having said that, note that we will be evaluating your project in 5 phases. We expect a high number of applications so if you want to stand out, *quality* is the way to go. What does it mean? In short, provide as many details as possible while being extremely clear and structured. This will help us to identify properly the key points of your application and see how it fits within the overall StairwAI scope.

4.1 Step 1: First Eligibility Check

The first evaluation step is about verifying some basic requirements based on the statements from your proposal. Your proposal will be admissible for the next phase if it:

- Is **complete, legible and in English** in all mandatory sections.
- Has been submitted via the online form <https://stairwai-3rd-open-call.fundingbox.com/> within the **deadline** (25 April 2023, 13:00 CEST). You won't be multiplying your chances by



applying several times. Only the last application that you submitted will be evaluated in case there is more than one.

- Has been submitted by a registered SME that is classified as a **low tech company** as described in section 3.1.
- Includes the properly filled Declaration of Honour (DoH). Read carefully the **Declaration of Honour** template included in the application form [here](#), as we will check the related submitted statements. You will not be able to change them after the deadline.

Moreover, a first check regarding the eligibility of the participants specified in Section 3 will be carried out.

Following this first step, we will move on to the pre-scoring phase described below.

4.2 Step 2: Pre-scoring

If we receive more than 60 eligible proposals, a pre-scoring system may be included to help us make a pre-selection.

What does this mean? The FundingBox Open Call Management System will automatically assign a score to the eligible proposals according to the following criteria:

- Dedication to the project (12,5% weight / up to 10 points),
- Team skills (12,5% weight / up to 10 points),
- Proved experience in the target market (12,5% weight / up to 10 points),
- Progress or traction during last 3 years (12,5% weight / up to 10 points),
- Scalability of the solution (12,5% weight / up to 10 points),
- Market opportunity (12,5% weight / up to 10 points),
- TRL level of your solution (12,5% weight / up to 10 points),
- Technology Level of your business (12,5% weight / up to 10 points).

As an applicant, you should:

- select the option that best describes the characteristics of your project in relation to each criterion,
- confirm that no false declarations are made.

In total, your project can receive **up to 80 points**. If your score places you in the best-marked applications (**up to 60 top-ranked applications** will be selected), well done!

As a next step, we will forward your application to an external pool of experts for a more detailed and qualitative evaluation and scoring.



We will inform you about the results of the eligibility check and the pre-scoring phase soon after these steps have been completed, generally in the week that follows the deadline of submitting the application.

4.3 Step 3: External Evaluation

If you have reached the external evaluation phase: bravo! And if not, be persistent: there may be other Open Calls for this project and other funding opportunities may suit - even better - your proposal.

For those who have been selected: from now on, each project will be evaluated by **2 external and independent** evaluators appointed according to the specific characteristics of your project.

These are criteria they will consider to complete the evaluation:

(1). EXCELLENCE will evaluate:

- **Ambition.** The applicants have to demonstrate to what extent the proposed Experiment (Pilot) has transformative potential for the business of the applicants in particular and for the entire value chain (e.g. stimulate the use of datasets and machine learning tools to improve their value chain, promotion of new business models based on the expected results, etc).
- **Innovation:** The applicants should provide information about the level of innovation within their market and about the degree of differentiation this experiment will bring.
- **Soundness of the approach.** The applicants should provide concrete and verifiable arguments, and/or evidence, with regards to the premises of the proposed ideas.

(2). IMPACT will analyse:

- **Market opportunity:** The applicants have to outline demonstrate a clear idea of what they want to do, till what extend the expected outcome will transform their business and at what pace it will contribute to increase revenue and/or reduce operational costs, e.g. whether the new/improved product/process solves a problem for a specific niche
- **Workforce:** The applicants have to provide information about the potential of the experiment results in retaining jobs, increasing its quality of jobs and improving the labour market security of the company.
- **SMEs productivity:** The applicants have to outline the strategy they will follow to get the replicability or reusability of the new/improved product/service/process (digital transformation strategy, uptake of other AI technologies, upskilling of the workforce) beyond just solving a specific problem within the company and how the experiment will allow them to improve the productivity.



(3). IMPLEMENTATION will consider:

- **Team:** The applicants have to demonstrate the engagement and commitment of the C-LEVELS managerial structures, their capacity to use the results of the experiments as part of a whole company strategy.
- **Resources.** Demonstrate the quality and effectiveness of the resources assigned in order to get the objectives/deliverables proposed.

Transversal criteria such as ‘Environment and low carbon economy contribution’, ‘Equal Opportunities & Gender balance’ and ‘Social Impact’ will be also considered by the experts when scoring the proposals.

The evaluators will score each criterion on a scale from 0 to 5:

0 = The proposal fails to address the criterion or it 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 proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses.

3 = Good – The proposal addresses the criterion well but there are a certain number of shortcomings.

4 = Very good – There is a small number of shortcomings but overall, the proposal addresses the criterion very well.

5 = Excellent – The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion with no or minor shortcomings.

Each evaluator will produce an Individual Evaluation Report. Your final score will be calculated as an average of the individual assessments provided by the Evaluators.

For each section, the threshold for individual criteria is 3 out of 5 points. The overall threshold, applying to the sum of the three individual scores, will be 10. The total maximum score is 15 points.

In case the average scores of the evaluators differ by 3 points or more in at least 2 of the criteria, we will involve a third evaluator in the process to make sure all applicants are treated equally and fairly.

In the case of ties, the following criteria will be used to rank the projects, in order:

- Impact score
- Excellence score
- Implementation score



- Transversal Criteria⁴
- Date of submission: earlier submitted proposals go first (the last edited version will be considered).

All proposals obtaining a score above the threshold will move on to the next stage. Do note that the evaluation phase takes time as it implies a more personal, qualitative and thus non-automated approach. But eventually, your patience will be rewarded!

4.4 Step 4: Consensus Meeting

Following the external evaluation, a 'Selection Committee' formed by selected consortium partners and, if needed, two external experts, will decide by Consensus (minimum $\frac{2}{3}$ of the votes) on the "List of Finalists" as well as the 'Reserve List'.

The decision will be based on the ranking obtained as a result of the External Evaluation. 'Selection Committee' may invite to the Consensus Meeting additional experts that will have the advisory role.

Bear in mind that even if it is normally the best-marked proposals that are selected for funding, the Selection Committee may have fair reasons for objecting to the selection of a specific candidate.

These reasons can relate to:

- The alignment with StairwAI goals and scope.
- The ability to achieve the strongest possible impact.
- Commercial competition.
- The existence of significant ethical concerns.
- The existence of a potential conflict of interest.
- The geo-coverage of proposals across eligible countries⁵.

In case a top-ranked application is rejected, we will consider selecting the next best-ranked proposal.

The exact number of proposals approved will be decided based on the overall **quality** of the proposals, taking into account both general ranking and trying to maximise the geo-coverage⁶.

In the case the number of proposals scored above the threshold is lower than 32, the Selection Committee might select the highest ranked applications scored below the threshold during the external evaluation stage.

⁴ Transversal criteria such as 'Environment and low carbon economy contribution', 'Equal Opportunities & Gender balance' and 'Social Impact' will be also considered by the experts when scoring the proposals

⁵ Please note that this is not a closed list of reasons for objecting.

⁶ StairwAI will do its best effort to invite SMEs from the possibly highest number of countries to ensure the widespread usage of AI resources by low-tech users across eligible countries.



4.5 Step 5: Subgrant Agreement Preparation and Signature

You made it! You are part of the final 32 pre-selected applicants for the StairwAI open call. It has been a long journey. Or has it actually just started?

In any case, before you get started with the StairwAI programme, you need to sign the SubGrant Agreement with the StairwAI Consortium (for the details please check our [Frequently Asked Questions Document](#)).

Before signing the SubGrant Agreement, you should provide documents regarding your formal status. The StairwAI Consortium will proceed to a **verification of these documents** to make sure you are eligible.

Be extremely vigilant with respect to:

1. **The nature of the documents** we request. If the documents you provide us with do not prove your eligibility, the adventure will end here.
2. **The deadlines** that we will give you to hand us these documents. If you do not deliver the requested documents on time, without a clear and reasonable justification, we will have to exclude you from the further formal assessment. Another applicant from the Reserve list will then replace you.

5. Our Support Programme and Payment Arrangements

Once your eligibility has been confirmed following the formal check and the SubGrant Agreement signed, you would be an official beneficiary of the StairwAI programme. It is now that the adventure begins and it is now high time to understand how the funding is going to be distributed.

Support Program

The Support Program **will last up to 2 months**. During this period you will be working together with top researchers and top business professionals to prepare the feasibility plan for the adoption of AI (including a technical plan and business model for the adoption of AI).

At the beginning of the Support Program, with support from your business and technical Mentors, you will define your **Individual Mentoring Plan (IMP)**. This document will become an Annex to the Subgrant Agreement and will establish the budget planned for the execution of your projects' KPIs and Deliverables that will be taken into account when evaluating your projects' performance at the end of the Program.



During the Support Program, you will be supported by:

- **Technical Mentor** with a wide background in AI and knowledge of technologies offered within the project,
- **Business Mentor** to support you in defining the Business Model and the Exploitation Plan for market deployment,
- **StairwAI services** (matchmaking tools developed by StairwAI consortium) to help you find the necessary resources for the AI adoption (experts in AI, HW resources),
- AI resources and tools available on **AI on Demand Platform**.

Milestone Review

Your performance during the Support Program will be reviewed by the 'Mentoring Committee' (with final validation by the 'Selection Committee') at the **Milestone Review** (established every time a payment is due), according to the criteria established in the Individual Mentoring Plan.

Each criterion will be scored from 0 to 10 and the weight of each one of these criteria, in the final score, will be as follow:

- Deliverable quality (30%).
- Technical performance indicators (30%).
- Business performance indicators (30%).
- Deadline Compliance (10%).

According to this final score, beneficiaries over threshold (7 points) will successfully receive the payment. Beneficiaries under threshold, the beneficiaries which haven't reached the threshold (7 points) will be proposed, by the 'Mentoring Committee', as candidates to leave the Program. And, if this decision is finally validated by the 'Selection Committee', they will have to leave the Program and won't receive the payment.

Payments

As a beneficiary, you will receive a **maximum € 10.000** in the form of a lump sum, at the end of the Support Programme.

The **lump-sum** is a simplified method of settling expenses in projects financed with Horizon 2020 funds. It means that you are not required to present accounting documents to prove the investment-related costs incurred (e.g. invoices). However, you are obliged to demonstrate that the implementation of the project is in line with the milestones set for it. The milestones (deliverables, KPIs and ethical recommendations) will be defined in the 'Individual Mentoring Plan' elaborated at the beginning of the programme.

In short, we will carefully assess your progress and the quality of your work during Milestone Reviews but we will not review your accountancy.



Bear in mind that the lump sum does not release you from the obligation to collect documentation to confirm the costs under national and international fiscal regulations.

Lastly, for a more detailed payment schedule, you can read our [Frequently Asked Questions](#).

6. Contact us

How can we help you?

If you still have any doubts regarding our Open Call process, feel free to get in touch with us and send us an email to the following address: info.stairwai@fundingbox.com.

If ever you face any technical issues or problems, make sure you include the following information in your message:

- Your username, telephone number and your email address.
- The details of the specific problem (error messages that appeared, bug descriptions such as a dropdown list that isn't working, etc.).
- Screenshots of the problem.

Complaints

First of all, be aware that we won't be reviewing your complaint **if**:

- ...It is anonymous.
- ...The information is incomplete.
- ...It is not related to the results of the evaluation of the eligibility criteria and pre-scoring. Indeed, most of the evaluation process is run by **independent experts** in the given field. The project consortium does not interfere with their assessment.

If, after receiving the results of the first eligibility criteria evaluation and pre-scoring, you consider that a mistake has been made, resulting in the rejection of your application, you have the right to send us a complaint. You can email us in English to: info.stairwai@fundingbox.com including the following information:

- Your contact details (including email address).
- The subject of the complaint.
- Information and evidence regarding the alleged mistake.

Important note regarding the timeline:

You have **3 calendar days** to submit your complaint starting from the day after the communication was sent. On our side, we will review them within no more than **7 calendar days** from its reception. If we need more time to assess your complaint, we will inform you by email about the extension.



7. Last but not least - final provisions

Any matters not covered by this Guide will be governed by Polish law and rules related to the Horizon 2020 programme and European Union grants regulations.

We do our best to keep all the **applicant data confidential**. However, to avoid any doubts, you are entirely responsible to indicate what information is confidential.

Your **IPR** will remain your property.

For the selected beneficiaries, the Subgrant agreement will include the set of obligations towards the European Commission (for example: promoting the project and giving visibility to the EU funding, maintaining confidentiality, understanding potential controls by the EC/ECA and OLAF).

The StairwAI Consortium might cancel the call at any time, change its provisions or extend it. In such a case we will inform all applicants about such change. The signature of the agreement is an initial condition to establish any obligations among applicants and any Consortium partner (with respect to the obligation of confidentiality of the application).

You didn't find what you were looking for? You may want to check our [Frequently Asked Questions Section](#).

8. Extra hints before submitting your proposal

A proposal takes time and effort and we know it. Here a few crucial points you should read before hitting the "Submit" button in order to maximise your chances of success:

- Is your project in line with what StairwAI is looking for? Not 100% sure? You can consult this [section](#) as well as this [one](#).
- Did you present your project in a way that will convince evaluators? Go back to this [section](#) if you have any doubt.
- Is your project fulfilling all the eligibility requirements described in the Guide for Applicants? Check again this [section](#).
- Are you able to cope with our signature agreement process and payment arrangements for the selected proposals? You may want to go over this [section](#).
- Did you check our Agreement Template? Check it [here](#).



- Do you need extra help? [Get in touch!](#)

And as a bonus: You can read our [R.E.C.I.P.E. for an outstanding European Funding Opportunity application](#) for additional advice. Good luck!

