

# EIC Pathfinder



strata



Guide for 2026

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# Introduction

## About these guidelines

The present guide provides an overview of the European Innovation Council (EIC) Pathfinder programme, Europe's flagship innovation programme that provides funding to breakthrough deep tech projects with a high degree of scientific and technological ambition and risk and potential to create new markets (TRL 1-4).

Although there are several funding programmes managed by the EIC, this guide focuses exclusively on the EIC Pathfinder. It intends to serve as an overview or starting point for applicants willing to apply for the EIC Pathfinder, or also for researchers seeking European funding.

The guide has been updated with the recent changes introduced by the European Commission. Readers are encouraged to read our **EIC Accelerator guide** if looking for information about

funding for higher TRLs (Technology Readiness Levels).

This guide also includes a summary of the results from the latest calls: a statistical analysis of the last call with a focus on its success rates, the most popular funding options, the geographic focus, and the most prominent areas.

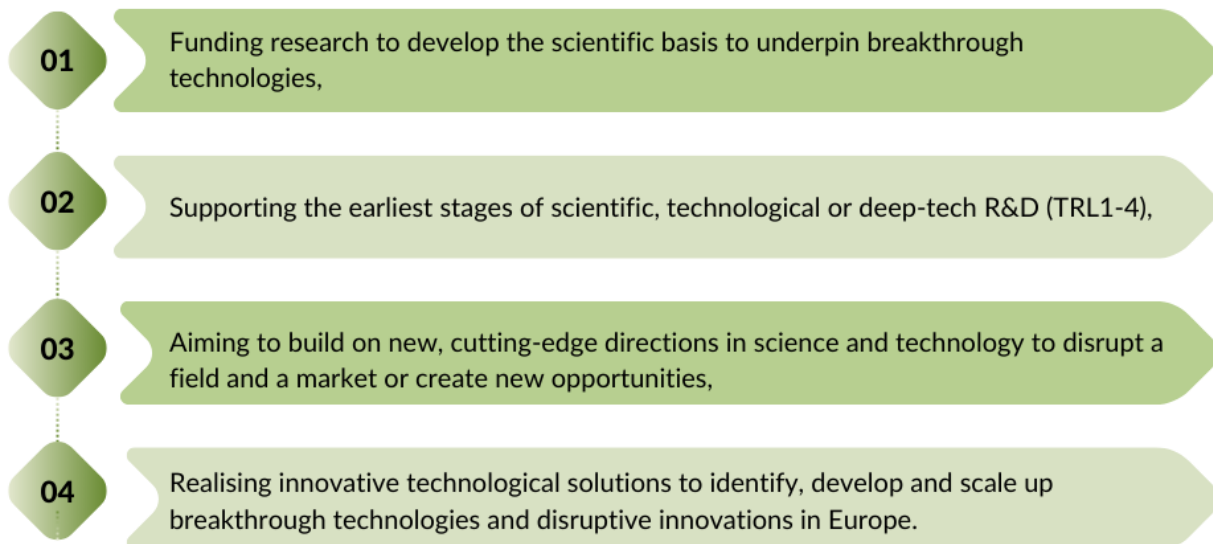
This document also dives deeper into the requirements applicants need to fulfill, as well as a brief explanation of how the application process works. Finally, it includes Strata's unique offering for those applicants willing to hire a professional and trustworthy consultancy firm.

In case further assistance is needed, please contact Strata through email at [hello@strata.team](mailto:hello@strata.team)

## General information

### What is the EIC Pathfinder?

With a total budget of **€262 million in 2026**, the EIC Pathfinder is a funding programme under Horizon Europe that offers support to research teams by:



For **Pathfinder Open**, proposals must be submitted by **12/05/2026** at 17h00 Brussels local time; for **Pathfinder Challenges** the deadline for submitting proposals is **28/10/2026** at 17h00 Brussels local time.

Apart from the EIC Pathfinder, the EIC also offers the EIC Transition, offering funding for technology validation and spin-out, to validate technologies and develop business plans for specific applications (TRL 3-6), as well as the EIC Accelerator, which offers blended finance to develop and scale up innovations with the potential to create or disrupt markets (TRL 6-8) under the patient capital principle.

### EIC Pathfinder Schemes

The EIC Pathfinder is divided into two schemes:

- **EIC Pathfinder Open (€166 million):** it is open to support projects in any field of science, technology or application without predefined thematic priorities.
- **EIC Pathfinder Challenges (€96 million):** it aims to support coherent portfolios of projects within predefined thematic areas with the aim to achieve specific objectives for each Challenge. During 2026, the EIC Pathfinder Challenges fall within the following topics:



## Biotechnology for Healthy Ageing

The Challenge will focus on advancing **biotechnology for healthy ageing**, promoting personalised care through molecular profiling, guiding policymakers and developers on regulatory approaches, and raising public awareness about healthy longevity.

**Budget: €32 million**

**Expected project size: €4M**

**Deadline: 28 October 2026**



## DeepRAP: Deep Reasoning, Abstraction & Planning towards trustworthy Cognitive AI Systems

This challenge will lay the groundwork for Europe's future leadership in safe and **human-centred AI**, strengthening competitiveness and technological sovereignty, while supporting the goals of the AI Act and the European approach to Artificial Intelligence.

**Budget: €32 million**

**Expected project size: €4M**

**Deadline: 28 October 2026**



## Advanced Materials for Miniaturised Energy Harvesting Systems

These advancements should support **sustainability in both energy consumption and production**, in line with the ambitions of RePowerEU and the European Green Deal. Furthermore, this challenge will enhance the overall sustainability of the Internet of Things (IoT) and energetically autonomous systems in general.

**Budget: €32 million**

**Expected project size: €4M**

**Deadline: October 28, 2026**

## Objectives of the EIC Pathfinder

### EIC PATHFINDER OPEN

To demonstrate the **feasibility of the core concepts** behind a proposed future technology, thereby establishing a solid scientific and technological foundation.

### DISCLAIMER

Projects **are not required to immediately address or achieve broader impacts**—such as creating new markets, enhancing quality of life, or solving global challenges.

EIC Pathfinder Open involves **interdisciplinary research and development**. To create new products and open new areas of research, applicants **must bring diverse areas of research together**, often with different perspectives, terminologies and methodologies, within individual projects and within a portfolio of projects.

### EIC PATHFINDER CHALLENGES

To **build on new cutting-edge directions** in science and technology to disrupt a field and a market or create new opportunities by realising innovative technological solutions grounded in high-risk/high-gain research and development.

### EXPECTED OUTCOMES







1. To **create high-quality scientific publications**, ideally in open access journals.
2. To **present a compelling vision** for their potential future impact.
3. Projects are expected to take steps to **ensure their findings** can be further developed and adopted in the future. This includes:
  - securing appropriate intellectual property rights, and
  - considering regulatory, certification, and standardization requirements.

### With each specific Challenge:

A portfolio of projects will be selected that explore different perspectives, competing approaches or complementary aspects of the Challenge. The complexity and high-risk nature of this research will require multidisciplinary collaborations.

## Budget

<p><b>TYPE OF FUNDING</b></p> 	<p>Non-reimbursable grants of <b>up to €4 million</b> to support early-stage development of future technologies (e.g. various activities at low TRL 1-3), up to proof of concept.</p> <p>The funding rate is 100% of the eligible costs.</p>	
<p><b>EIC PATHFINDER OPEN</b></p>		<p><b>EIC PATHFINDER CHALLENGES</b></p>
<p><b>€166 million</b> in funding. Up to €3 million per project.</p> <p><b>Any field</b> of science, technology or application without predefined thematic priorities.</p> <p>Grant for a <b>Research and Innovation Action to cover the eligible costs</b>, necessary for the implementation of their project.</p>	    	<p><b>€96 million</b> in funding. Up to €4 million per project.</p> <p><b>Fields fall within 3 challenges</b> (see above)</p> <p>Grant for a <b>Research and Innovation Action to cover the eligible costs</b>, necessary for the implementation of your project, including the portfolio activities.</p>
<p>This does not preclude applicants from requesting larger amounts if duly justified.</p>		<p>This does not preclude applicants from requesting larger amounts, if duly justified or stated otherwise in the specific Challenge.</p>

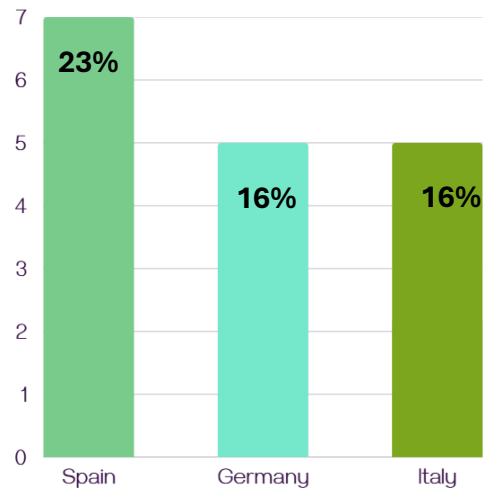
## Latest results

As of the date of publication of this guide, the latest results published correspond to the 2024 Challenges call and the 2025 Open call (May 2025).

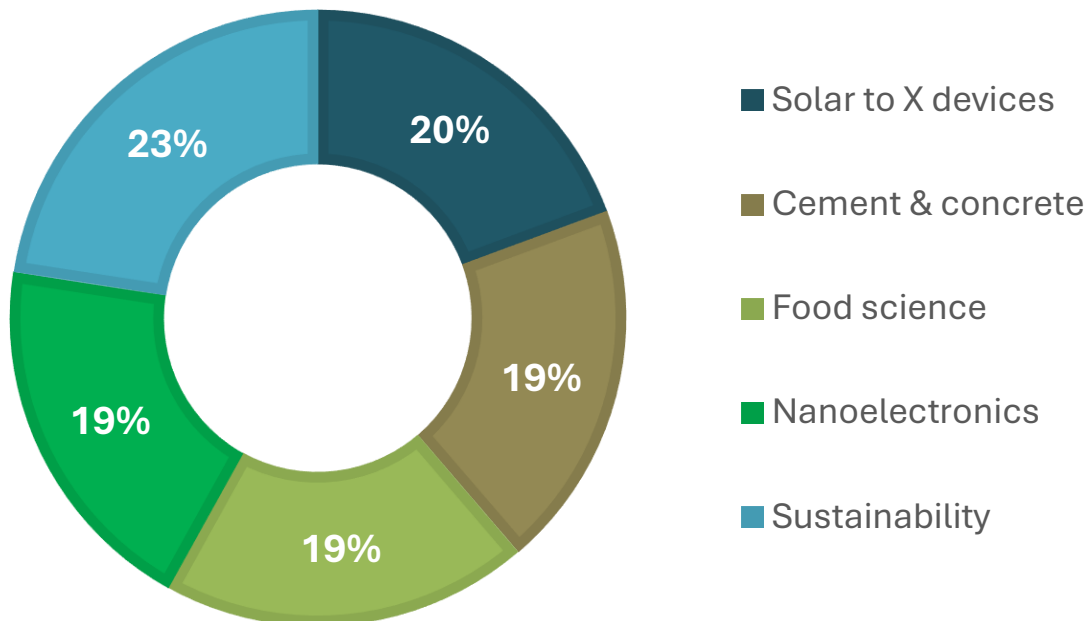
### Results of the EIC Pathfinder Challenges (2024)

In March 2024 call, **31 new disruptive projects** received **€116 million in funding**.

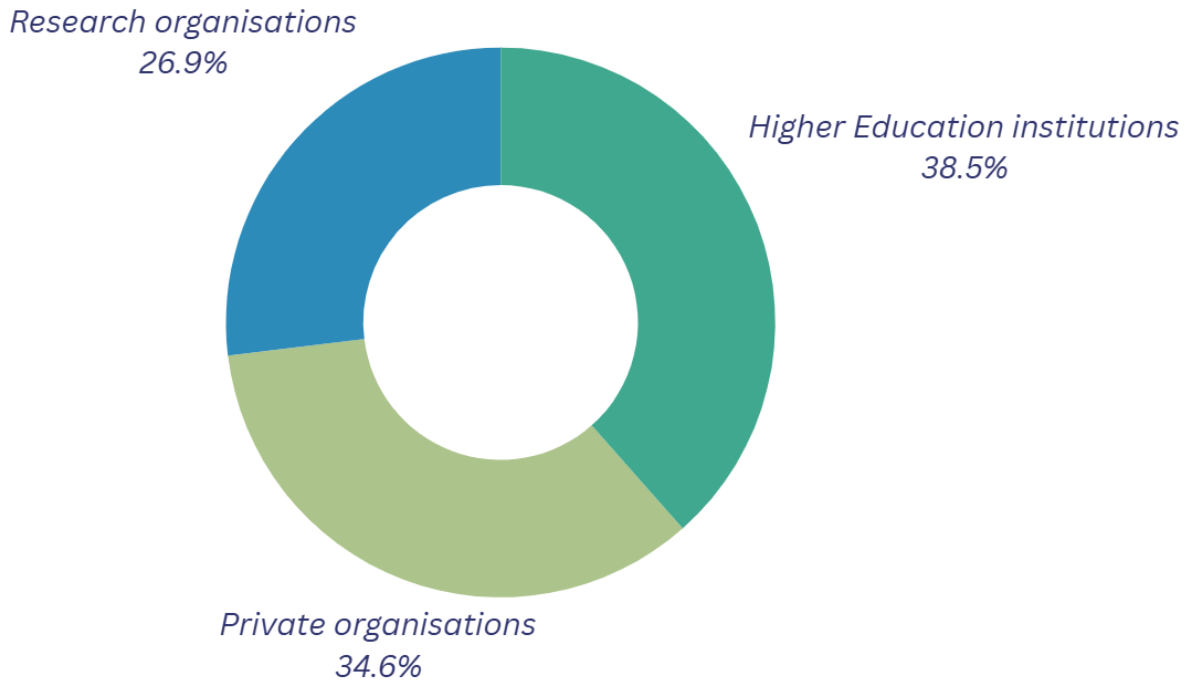
Winners spread across **12 countries**



For this specific call, all challenges funded the same number of projects (6 each) except for the sustainability challenge, which had 7 projects:



Participants predominantly come from higher education institutions (38%), private organisations (34%), and research organisations (23%).

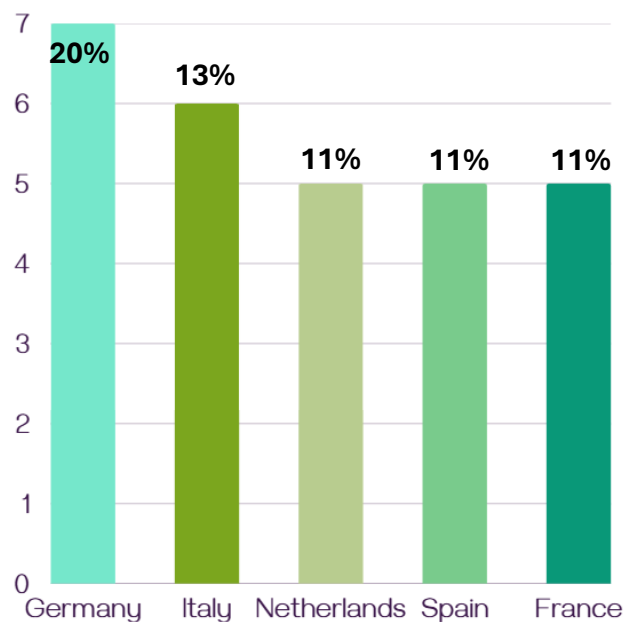


## Results of the EIC Pathfinder Open (May 2025)

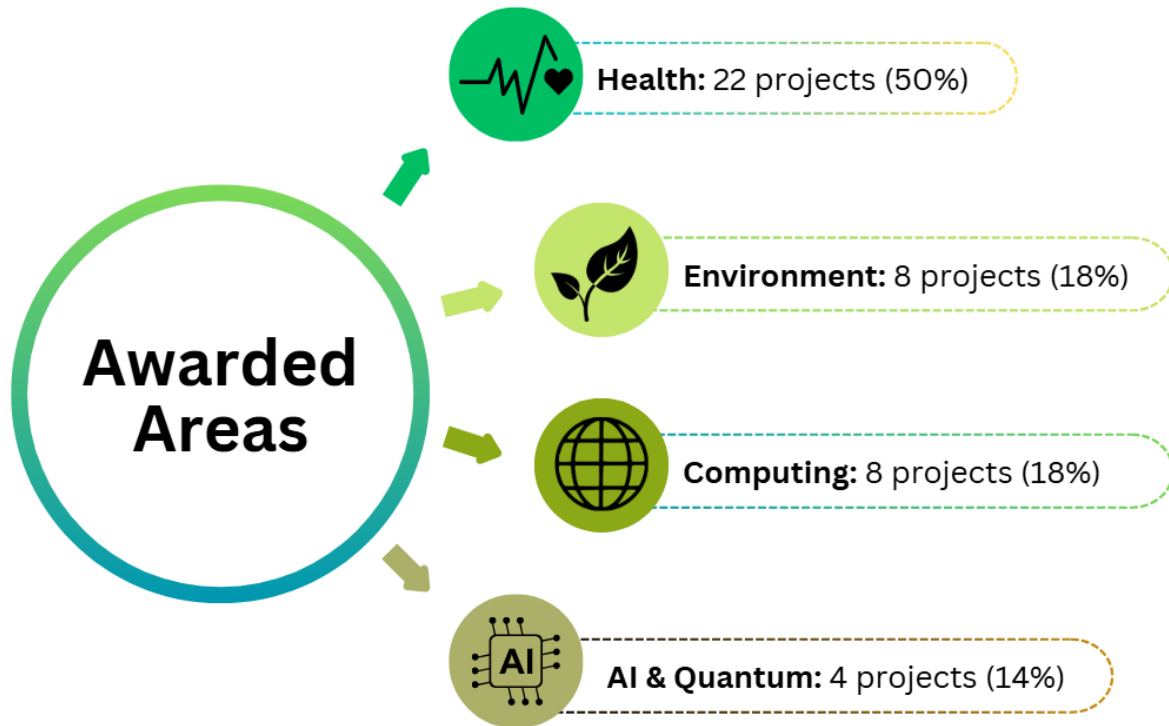
If we look at the EIC Pathfinder Open call in March 2024, there were important changes in the results obtained:



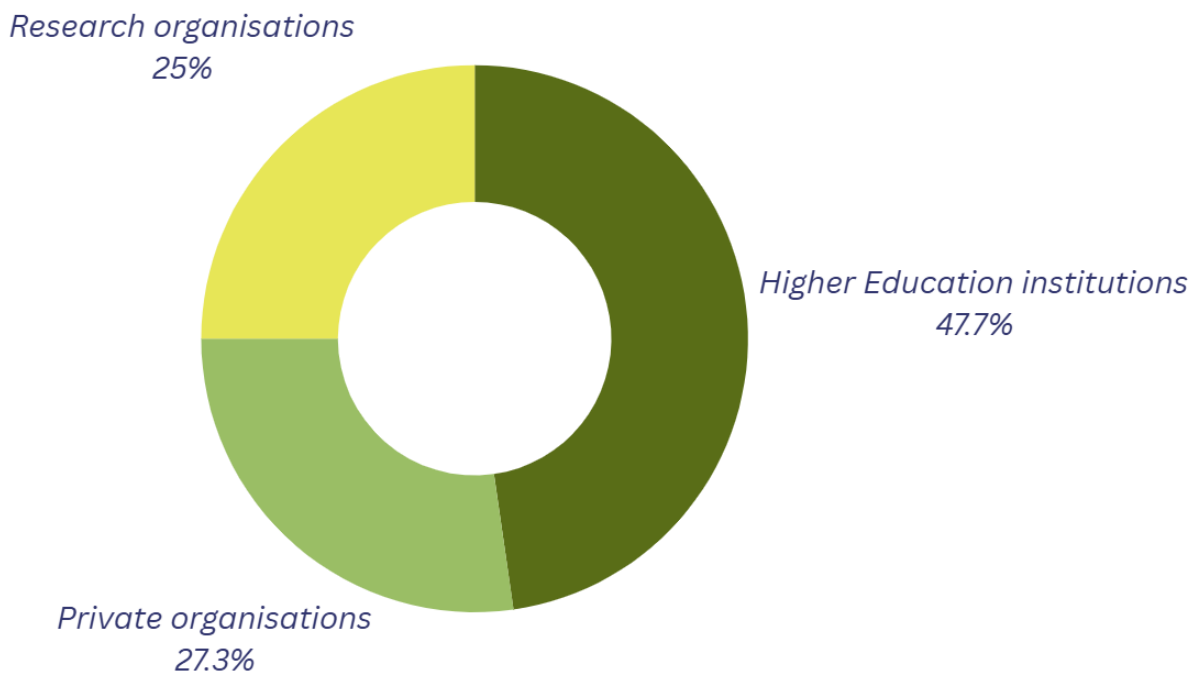
Winners spread across **16 countries**



The most awarded area was **health**:



From the 44 winners, 21 were HE institutions, 12 were private companies and 11 were research organisations:



# Requirements for Applicants

## Who can apply?

Consortia from EU Member States and countries associated to the Horizon Europe programme can apply to the EIC Pathfinder as long as:

- At least three different independent legal entities are present,
- At least one legal entity is established in a Member State,
- At least two other independent legal entities, each established in different Member States or Associated Countries,
- Additionally, single applicants or small consortia (two partners) can apply for EIC Pathfinder Challenges only.

For **Pathfinder Open**, proposals must be submitted by **12/05/2026** at 17h00 Brussels local time; for **Pathfinder Challenges** deadline for submitting proposals is **28/10/2026** at 17h00 Brussels local time.

## Funding Conditions

The funding rate for EIC Pathfinder grants is 100% for eligible costs from TRL1 to 4.

Besides, projects funded through EIC

Pathfinder may be eligible:

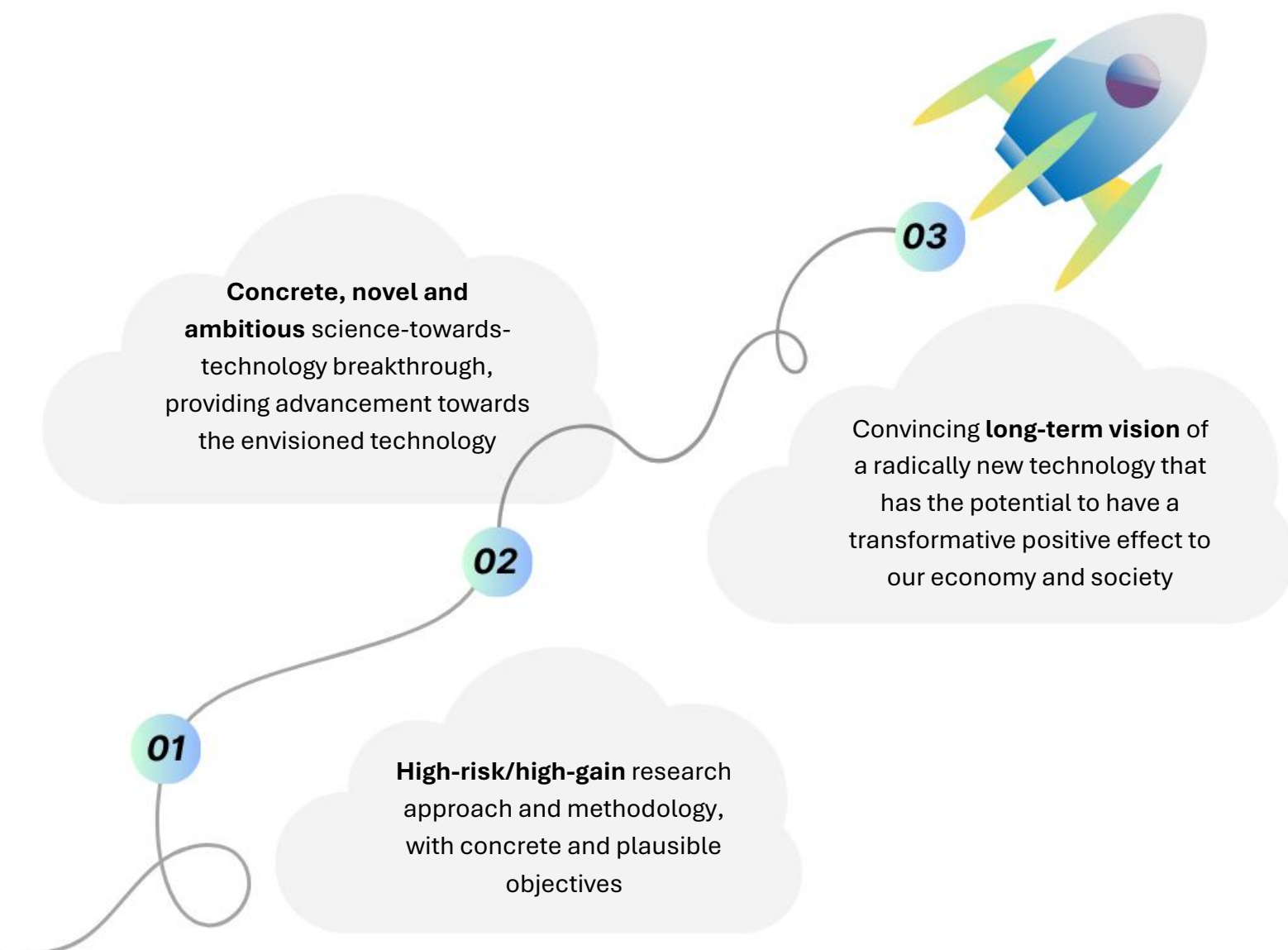
- to receive EIC Booster grants of a fixed amount not exceeding €50.000 to undertake complementary activities to explore potential pathways to commercialisation or for portfolio activities;
- to submit an EIC Transition proposal;
- to submit an EIC Accelerator proposal via the Fast Track scheme;
- to participate in the 'Next Generation Innovation Talents' scheme. The personnel costs of researchers participating in this scheme are eligible under your Pathfinder grants.

Submissions must be made via the EU Funding & Tenders Portal before the deadline. Sections 1 to 3 of the part B of proposals, corresponding respectively to the award criteria Excellence, Impact, and Quality and Efficiency of the Implementation, must consist of a maximum of 22 pages (A4 format). Results are published within 5 months from the call deadline (indicative) and proposals selected for funding shall be signed by 8 months after the call deadline (indicative).

## How the Application Process Works

### Eligibility

Proposals must meet all the following essential characteristics in order to apply for the **EIC Pathfinder**:

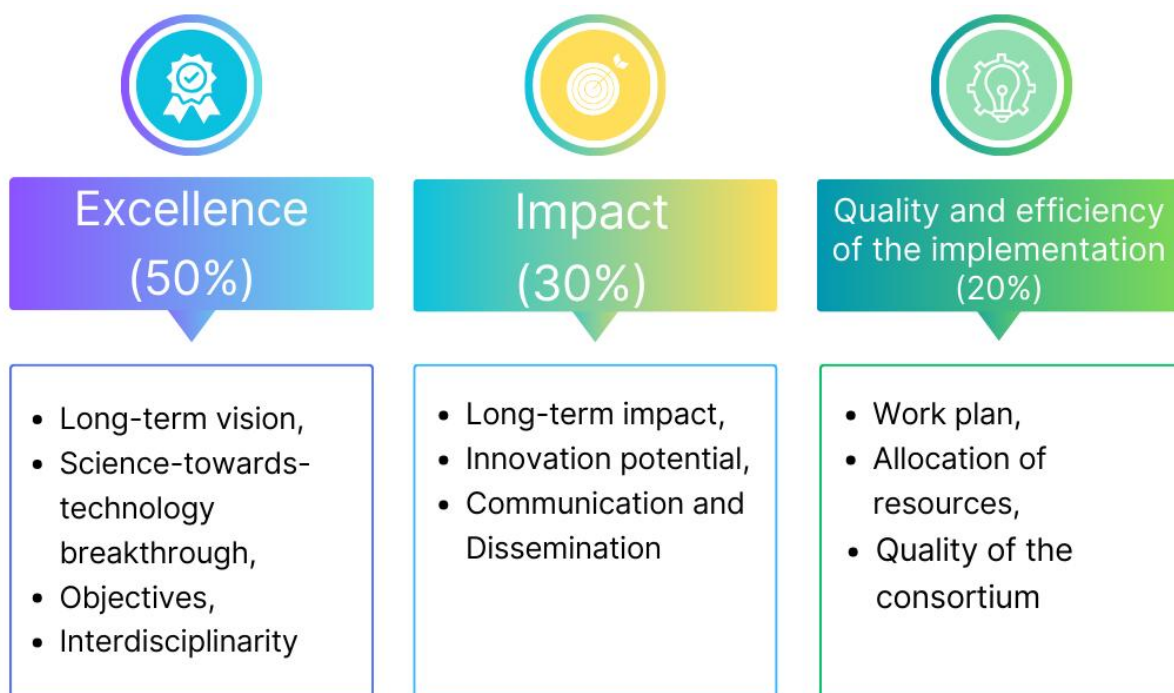


Proposals must be submitted by the coordinator, on behalf of a consortium for the Open Call but single applicants are allowed if applying to the Challenges call as described above.

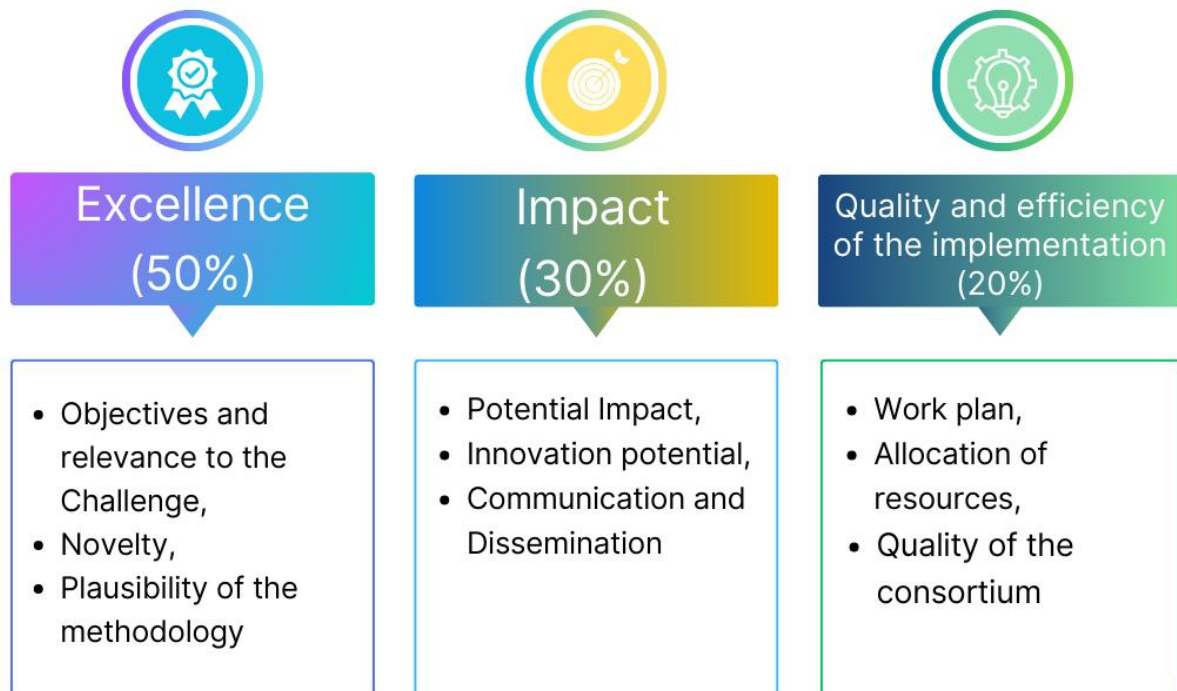
## Evaluation

Proposals for both the **EIC Pathfinder Open and Challenges** will be first evaluated and scored individually with respect to the award criteria by at least four EIC expert evaluators. The score for each award criterion will be the average of the evaluators' scores. The overall score from this individual evaluation phase will be the weighted sum of the three average scores from the three award criteria.

The evaluation committee, which will be composed of EIC expert evaluators different from those who evaluated the proposals individually, will decide on the final score on the basis of the score from the individual evaluation phase and the outcome of its consensus discussions.



Awarded criteria for the **EIC Pathfinder Open**.



Awarded criteria for the **EIC Pathfinder Challenges**.

## The EIC Pathfinder in 2026

### Main changes for 2026

The 2026 Work programme includes minor changes such as increasing the project scope and simplifying administrative aspects. The indicative budget size of EIC Pathfinder projects is increased to **€4 million**, and it also includes the introduction of lump sum funding. This means that eligible costs for both Pathfinder Open and Challenges will take the form of a lump sum, the amount of which will be determined during the evaluation process.

## Strata's Unique Offering



### Personal service

We operate in small, dedicated teams. Your project team of three expert consultants will stay with you throughout the entire process, with all three consultants reviewing every single document and attending meetings.



### Market-leading success rates

Our success rates are typically 4× above the market average and we have already secured over €80 million in public funding. We publish many of our success cases on our website.



### Expertise and experience

We ensure that all our teams comprise a blend of business management, market and commercialisation, IP, financial, organisation and people, and technological expertise with a relevant background in innovation management and entrepreneurship.



### Intelligent and trustworthy

We perform careful independent evaluations and in-depth due diligence on all funding applications to ensure the highest chances of success. We bring in external experts for additional analysis, where required, at no extra cost.



### Blended finance

We help our customers acquire the co-funding needed to unlock non-dilutive grants through investor matchmaking services. We can connect startups with +300 investors.

# Ready to apply for the EIC Pathfinder?

Get in touch with us

hello@strata.team | ++34 91 946 41 96 | <https://www.strata.team/>

