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Call for Expression of Interest for Tech-Savvy Companies



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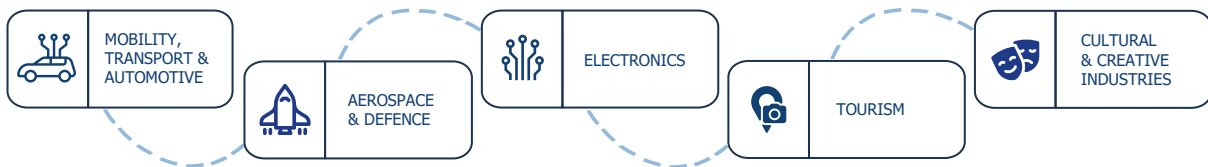
1. Overview and General Information

1.1 About BRIDGESMES

BRIDGESMES is a project funded by the European Commission (Horizon Europe) with the aim of driving the digital and green transition of SMEs, promoting the principles of Industry 5.0: resilience, sustainability and human-centricity.



The BRIDGESMES project focuses on European SMES active in **five industrial ecosystems** (Mobility, Transport & Automotive; Aerospace & Defence; Electronics; Cultural & Creative Industries; Tourism) helping them to re-think their business models and operations to become more resilient, sustainable, and human-centric.



In this context, BRIDGESMES will facilitate alliances between pilot (tech-adopters) and tech-savvy SMEs & start-ups, as well as accelerate the deployment of innovative solutions to support companies across value chains. The consortium will conduct an assessment of the current status of the Five Industrial Ecosystems, identify needs, disruptions, challenges, and opportunities related to technology adoption and transition towards Industry 5.0, and will involve -through two open calls- 15 pilot and 15 tech-savvy companies to a range of activities targeting to:

- Explore collaboration opportunities among pilot and tech-savvy SMEs and start-ups.
- Increase the adoption of advanced technologies in pilot SMEs.
- Support tech-savvy SMEs in market deployment of advanced technological solutions.
- Collaboration among the partners for business opportunities, lessons learnt and policy recommendations.
- Share the project knowledge to foster technology uptake across Europe.

For the purposes of the BRIDGESMES project, companies are defined as follows:

Tech-savvy SME/start-up: a company that implements HW and SW technologies such as the following (non-exhaustive list): knowledge-intensive technologies associated with high R&D intensity, rapid innovation cycles, substantial investment expenditure and highly qualified jobs, such as of advanced manufacturing, additive manufacturing, augmented reality, modelling and simulation, robotics, horizontal/vertical integration of information, IoT, Cloudcomputing, Cyber-Security and Business Continuity, Big Data and Analytics.

Manufacturing SME: a company operating in one of these sectors -Mobility, Transport & Automotive; Aerospace & Defence (MTA); Electronics -that produces goods and services through specific industrial processes and do not fit in the definition of tech-savvy.

Tourism and/or Cultural&Creative SME: a company that does not apply extensively advanced technologies in its business and do not fit in the redefinition of tech-savvy.

1.2 Specific Objectives and ambition

The objective of this Open Call is to select 15 tech-savvy SMEs and start-ups from Europe to be involved as future beneficiaries of BRIDGESMEs activities and benefit for free of a range of services as described in Section 2.

Our ambition is to provide a networking opportunity for pilot (tech-adopters) SMEs and tech-savvy SMEs/start-ups to further advance their collaboration process.

2. BRIDGESMEs Tech-Savvy Support Package

2.2 BRIDGESMEs Benefits

A dedicated support package for the selected tech-savvy SMEs/start-ups will include the following benefits:

Investment Readiness support

The technological and financial maturity of tech-savvy SMEs will be addressed one-to-one through a best practice tool, i.e. the investment readiness level. The analysis of the investment readiness of SMEs will cover different readiness dimensions including leadership team capability, product readiness, market readiness and financial strategy. The assessed SMEs will be categorised under 3 Levels: (1) Investment ready, (2) Almost ready and (3) Non-ready.

Business support services

Based on the assigned investment readiness levels ad-hoc business support services will be provided (e.g.: business modelling, business planning, route-to-market, financial scouting, IPR management, etc.). Moreover, the BRIDGESMEs Consortium will boost the business competences of tech-savvy SMEs by delivering 3 webinars on (1) Innovation management; (2) Go-to-market strategy; (3) Financial strategy. The training will be developed in an interactive manner to thoroughly address the weaknesses and the challenges faced by tech-savvy SMEs and start-ups as they pursue access to investment and financing sources.

Access to funding

The financing gap of tech-savvy SMEs/start-ups will be satisfied through the scouting of equity, debt, hybrid instruments and grants funding sources based on the investment readiness maturity and risks, with a particular focus on boosting and accelerating the transition towards Industry 5.0. Tech-savvy SMEs will be supported in access the most appropriate for their IR level financing resource (venture capital, EU grants/EU financing instruments/public funds, business angel, strategic investor/corporate investor, credit line/bank loan, debt financing, private equity, crowdfunding). Tech-savvy SMEs will also receive support in understanding the basic preparations and the requirements for applying for funding.

Establishment of alliances between pilot and tech-savvy SMEs

The establishment of new collaborations between SMEs will be achieved through the organisation of hackathons events and match-making sessions for direct bridging.

Hackathons: A hackathon is typically a time-bound competitive event where participants collaborate to build proofs of concept and minimum viable products for a specific pre-defined problem or to innovate. Five local hackathons will be organized (Austria, France, Greece, Italy, Spain), each focusing on one of the five industrial ecosystems and involving pilot and tech-savvy SMEs. The aim of the hackathons will be to address the needs and challenges pilot SMEs face by identifying or/and developing potential solutions with the advanced technologies provided by tech-savvy SMEs/start-ups. The hackathons will stimulate the local innovation ecosystems and will serve as the first step for supporting the matching between the demand of the pilot SMEs (tech-adopters) and the offer of tech-savvy SMEs and start-ups on the market.

Matchmaking events: Building on the hackathons, match-making sessions will aim at facilitating further exchanges, interactions, pairing between pilot and tech-savvy SMEs and setting-up SMEs partnerships for technology uptake and deployment. Tech-savvy SMEs will have the possibility to present their technological solutions directly to additional potential clients, increasing their possibilities for market deployment, and having the opportunity to better adapt their offering to the needs of the market. In this context, the matchmaking events will build on the hackathon events and the solutions/technologies developed, encouraging and facilitating more meetings between tech-savvy and pilot SMEs with compatible profiles.

Mentoring Services

Startups will have access to a free range of mentoring and training services to address their specific needs and challenges. As part of the program, it will be offered access to carefully selected, and experienced mentors who will provide guidance, support, and valuable insights tailored to each founder and designed to help them succeed in their business ventures.

Industry 5.0 Diffusion Initiatives

The project will launch further initiatives to promote the uptake of advanced technologies and the diffusion of Industry 5.0 practices. Broad adoption of Industry 5.0 principles is expected, with a strong emphasis on **collaboration and communication among supply chain partners**, enabling SMEs to share data and insights with their partners in real-time, allowing for better coordination and decision-making in the face of disruptions, supported by cluster organisations. Further, European industrial ecosystems will embrace sustainability and reduce

the environmental impact of their operations. adopting circular economy principles, leading to a more sustainable and resilient supply chain. The use of human-centered technologies that align with European social and ethical values, improving efficiency, reliability, and sustainability also poses risks of increased inequalities.

2.2 Who can apply

Tech-Savvy companies¹ (SMEs and start-ups) that develop hardware and/or software technologies for one or more of the BRIDGESMEs targeted five industrial ecosystems (Mobility, Transport & Automotive, Aerospace & Defense, Cultural & Creative Industries, Electronics, and Tourism) can apply for this call.

Companies shall meet the following criteria to be eligible.

SME status: Applicants must be an SME and declare their SME status in accordance with the SME definition of the European Union. Being a small - or medium-sized enterprise (SME), according to the definition in EU recommendation 2003/361:

Company category	Staff headcount	Turnover	OR	Balance sheet total
Medium Sized	< 250	≤ € 50 m		≤ € 43 m
Small	< 50	≤ € 10 m		≤ € 10 m
Micro	< 10	≤ € 10 m		≤ € 2 m

Established country: Applicants must be established in an EU Member State or Horizon Europe Associated Country².

Sectors of Activity: Applicants must provide solutions for one or more of the BRIDGESMEs targeted five sectors, namely (1) **Mobility, Transport & Automotive**; (2) **Aerospace & Defence**; (3) **Cultural & Creative Industries**; (4) **Electronics** and (5) **Tourism**.

3. Application

3.1 Eligibility conditions

Applications will be eligible and enter the evaluation phase if all the following conditions are met.

s/n	Eligibility criteria
1	Applicants must be SMEs and declare their SME status in accordance with the SME definition of the European Union ³ .

¹ A detailed definition of tech-savvy SMEs/start-ups can be found in Section 1.1

² List of Horizon Europe Associated Countries as published by the European Commission on the submission date https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/guidance/list-3rd-country-participation_horizon-atom_en.pdf

³ An SME will be considered as such if complying with the European Commission Recommendation 2003/361/EC

2	Applicants must be SMEs that develop hardware and/or software technologies for one or more of the BRIDGESMEs targeted five industrial ecosystems (Mobility, Transport & Automotive, Aerospace & Defence, Cultural & Creative Industries, Electronics, and Tourism). The detailed definition of tech-savvy SMEs can be found in Section 1.1.
3	Applicant(s) must be established in an EU Member State or Horizon Europe Associated Country.
4	Application and supporting documentation must be written in English (applications partially written in another language are not eligible).
5	Applications must be submitted through the BRIDGESMEs website link by the deadline indicated in section 3.2 of the present Call.

3.2 Where, when and how to apply

The BRIDGESMEs Call for Expression of Interest for Tech-Savvy companies is launched on May 20, 2024, and will be open until June 28th, 2024, @ 17.00 CET.

Candidates are required to submit their application by filling in the application form and upload a **Pitch Deck** to participate in the Call.

Applicant companies must follow the guidelines provided for the Pitch Deck. Please refer to the Annex of the Call for further information and **download the respective Pitch Deck template**.

To apply, click at the current link (<https://bridgesmes.eu/open-calls>). Only proposals submitted through the BRIDGESMEs website within the deadline (June 28th, 2024, @ 17.00 CET) will be evaluated. Upon receipt of each application, the system will send you a confirmation of your submission. After submission, the applicant will receive an e-mail which states the date and time of the submitted application.

Only one application per company will be accepted and in case of multiple applications submitted by the same company, only the most recent submission will be reviewed.

It is strongly recommended not to wait until the last minute to submit the application. Failure of the application to arrive in time for any reason, including network communications delays or working from multiple browsers or multiple browser windows, is not acceptable as an extenuating circumstance. The time of receipt of the application as recorded by the submission system will be definitive.

4. Evaluation, Selection and Contract

A two-step evaluation will take place.

1. **Eligibility check** of each application (please refer to Section 3.1) and, if successful;
2. **Individual evaluation:** each eligible application will be evaluated by an Evaluation Panel consisting of 2 experts from the BRIDGESMEs consortium partners following the

evaluation criteria. These representatives have solid knowledge on topics related to the project therefore their views and opinions will ensure that the most suitable candidates are selected. Applications will be ranked according to their scores.

The **evaluation criteria** are the following:

- Alignment with the BRIDGESMEs project goals and expectations, and with Industry 5.0
- Level of ambition of the initiative in terms of innovation and/or Industry 5.0 orientation
- Maturity level of the initiative and time-to-market
- Potential market impact
- Potential to generate Industry 5.0 impacts, in relation to human-centricity, resilience and sustainability.
- Quality of the team

The evaluators will score each application on a scale from 0 to 5. The meaning of the scores are as follows:

- **1 – Very Poor.** The information provided is considered irrelevant or inadequate, compared to the specific call provisions.
- **2 – Poor.** The information provided lacks relevant quality and contains significant weaknesses, compared to the specific call provisions.
- **3 – Fair.** The overall information provided is adequate, however, some aspects are unclearly or insufficiently detailed, compared to the specific call provisions.
- **4 – Good.** The information provided is adequate with good, outlined details, compared to the specific call provisions.
- **5 – Excellent.** The information provided is outstanding in its details, clarity and coherence, compared to the specific call provisions.

A final score will be assigned to each application and a ranking list will be developed. The threshold score for each individual evaluation is 3. Applications that exceed the overall threshold of 6 scores applying to the sum of the two individual scores will be invited for an evaluation interview, and the list of awarded projects will be generated based on the interview scores.

After the announcement of the results an Agreement will be signed between the BRIDGESMEs consortium and each selected company.

5. Timeline and Deadlines

ACTIVITIES AND DEADLINES	
Publication Date of the Call for Expression of Interest	May 20th 2024
Deadline for submission	June 28th 2024, @17:00 CET
Evaluation process (individual evaluation by the consortium partners and interviews with companies)	July-August 2024
Final list with selected companies	September 2024

6. Confidentiality and data protection

GDPR compliance: The [General Data Protection Regulation](#) (2016/679/EU) guarantees that the processing of data is carried out in compliance with the fundamental rights and freedoms, as well as the dignity of the data subject with particular reference to confidentiality, personal identity and the right to data protection. BRIDGESMEs consortium will process personal data in line with the regulation mentioned above.

By applying, the applicant agrees on the storage and use of its personal data for the execution of the BRIDGESMEs objectives and work plan. The processing of data that BRIDGESMEs intends to carry out will be based on lawfulness and correctness in the full protection of its rights and its confidentiality pursuant to the general principles of the GDPR and its art.24. Therefore, the competitors are informed of the procedure that the data provided by the applicants will be treated exclusively with reference to the procedure for which they submitted the documentation.

The applicants can exercise their rights towards the data controller, pursuant to article 12 of the GDPR. For any inquiries regarding the processing your personal data, please contact dpo@athena-innovation.gr

Applications' selection and evaluation will be performed under the appropriate ethical conduct and will respect the confidentiality of the information received.

7. Contact Information

For further questions, additional information, or assistance regarding the project and the Open Call for tech-savvy companies, interested parties are invited to contact our dedicated team at BRIDGESMEs@corallia.org.

8. Attachments

Annex1 - Pitch Deck Guidelines

Annex 1: Pitch Deck Guidelines

Participation in the Call for Expression of Interest is subject to the submission of a pitch containing a comprehensive presentation of the initiative itself. The pitch, consisting of a maximum of 15 slides (front and back included), will be evaluated by the BRIDGESMEs Consortium to identify and select the start-ups/SMEs to be involved in the project activities and benefit of the services provided. Below is a guide with the content for the pitch and the respective pitch deck to be used and submitted can be downloaded [HERE](#).

1. Problem, Opportunity, Concept
2. Solution, product, service
3. Target Market and Customers
4. Business Model
5. Unique Selling point(s) / USP
6. Competition Analysis
7. Marketing and Growth Strategy
8. Team and Skills
9. Impact towards Industry5.0 transition of the proposed solutions
10. Financial Data (historic and forecast)
11. Conclusion and Contact Information