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Project acronym: **BRIDGESMEs**

Project full title: **Boosting Resilience In five industrial ecosystems through adoption and Deployment of advanced technoloGiEs among SMEs**

Call for Expression of Interest for Pilot SMEs



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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 manufacturing SMEs (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 assess 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- 20 pilot and 20 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/Pilot 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 definition of tech-savvy.

1.2 Specific Objectives and ambition

The objective of this Call for Expression of interest is to select 20 pilot SMEs 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 manufacturing SMEs and tech-savvy SMEs to further advance their collaboration process.

2. BRIDGESMEs Pilot SMEs Support Package

2.1 BRIDGESMEs benefits

A dedicated support package for the selected pilot manufacturing SMEs will include the following benefits:

Technical assistance

Technical assistance valued in 50.000€ will be provided for free under the form of technical expertise and recommendations related to specific technology needs, including a preliminary diagnosis of technological needs and barriers, along with subsequent technological consulting over the course of one year, providing individualized support to SMEs in developing a roadmap for the implementation of Industry 5.0 technologies.

Specific training and access to intelligent and reconfigurable facilities including fab-labs, pilot lines and testbeds will be promoted through open door seminars, organized by project's RTO to showcase technologies such as *Digitalization, Robotics, Photonics, Extended Reality, Big Data & AI, and Advanced Manufacturing*.

Business support

Business support for the adoption of advanced technologies will be provided to selected SMEs. An innovation assessment will be implemented through the Business Innovation Roadmap Tool that would allow to analyse and to position the SME's business innovation challenges and to establish a priority roadmap of measures and actions. The SMEs will develop a strategic action plan for the implementation of their innovative ideas focused on the adoption of advanced technologies.

Access to public and private funding

Business support activities will be completed by the identification of solutions to the financing needs for investments and support to access public and private funding for the adoption of advanced technologies.

Education and training for new skills

Education and training programme will be created by the RTO's engaged in the project. 10 training online modules, each module with overall approximately 2.5 hours of study will be organised. The participants will receive a certificate together with micro-credentials to ensure the recognition of the training activity. The training modules offered will address critical areas and skills for reducing the existing knowledge gap of the SMEs staff for the adoption of advanced technologies.

Establishment of alliances between pilot SMEs 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

Five local hackathons will be organized focusing on each of the five industrial ecosystems, involving the pilot and tech-savvy SMEs. The hackathons will stimulate the local innovation ecosystems and support the matching between the demand of the pilot SMEs (tech-adopters) and the offer of tech-savvy SMEs and start-ups on the market. Manufacturing SMEs will have the opportunity to present their challenges while tech-savvy SMEs will present them their solutions.

Matchmaking events

Building on the hackathons, match-making sessions will aim at pairing pilot and tech-savvy SMEs. Tech-savvy SMEs will present their technological solutions directly allowing them to better adapt their offering to the needs of the market. In this context, the matchmaking events will build on the hackathon events, encouraging and facilitating meetings between tech-savvy and pilot SMEs with compatible profiles.

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?

Companies (SMEs) operating in one of these sectors -Mobility, Transport & Automotive (MTA); Aerospace & Defence; Electronics; Cultural & Creative Industries and Tourism -that produces goods and services through specific industrial processes and do not fit in the definition of tech-savvy.

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 size	< 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 Country](#).

Sectors of Activity: Applicants must operate in the five sectors covered by the project, namely (1) **Mobility, Transport & Automotive**; (2) **Aerospace & Defense**; (3) **Cultural & Creative Industries**; (4) **Electronics** and (5) **Tourism**.

Application form – Call for Expression of Interest

2.3 Eligibility criteria

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 as part of the application via this link .
2	Applicants must produce goods and services through specific industrial processes and do not fit in the definition of tech-savvy and operate in at least one of the five industrial sectors targeted by the

	project (Mobility, Transport & Automotive; Aerospace & Defense; Electronics; Cultural and Creative Industries; Tourism)
3	Applicant(s) must be established in an EU Member State.
4	Applications 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.

2.4 Where, when and how to apply?

The BRIDGESMEs Call for Expression of Interest for pilot SMEs companies is launched on September 2nd, 2024, and will be open until October 14th, 2024 @ **17.00 CET**.

Candidates are required to submit their application by filling in the application form online. To apply, click at the current link (<https://bridgesmes.eu/open-calls/pilot-smes>). Only proposals submitted through the BRIDGESMEs website within the deadline (October 14th, 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.

3. Evaluation and selection

Before entering the BRIDGESMEs support programme, a two-step evaluation will take place.

1. **Eligibility check** of the Application.
2. **Individual evaluation:** each member of the application review panel will evaluate the application form following the evaluation criteria. Applications will be ranked according to their scores.

The evaluators will assess the applications based on 2 different evaluation criteria (**Alignment and Implementation**).

1) **Alignment of the transformation needs and challenges:** Applicants must demonstrate a clear set of objectives and needs aligned with the definition of BRIDGESMEs goals and with Industry 5.0 principles.

2) **Impact:** Applicants must define their ambition and a clear set of expectations aligned with the objectives of BRIDGESMEs. Proposals must demonstrate the impact of the programme and its contribution to the SME development. Finally, they have to demonstrate the relevance of the Team’s skills, their motivation, and commitment to execute the project, in order to insure the impact of their participation.

The evaluators will score each question on a scale from 0 to 5. The meaning of the scores with respect to the sub-criteria are as follows:

- **1 – Poor.** The sub-criterion is addressed in an inadequate manner, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.
- **2 – Fair.** While the proposal broadly addresses the sub-criterion, there are significant weaknesses.
- **3 – Good.** The proposal addresses the sub-criterion well, but with at least one moderate weakness.
- **4 – Very good.** The proposal addresses the sub-criterion very well, although with minor weaknesses.
- **5 – Excellent.** The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the sub-criterion in question. Any shortcomings are minor.

An evaluation grid with respective weights and scores will be applied during the proposal evaluation, and a final score will be assigned to each application. Applications that exceed the predefined threshold score will be invited for an evaluation interview, and the list of awarded projects will be generated based on the interview scores.

4. Timeline and Deadlines

Activities and deadlines	
Publication of the Call for Expression of Interest	September 2nd 2024
Deadline for submission	October 14th 2024, @17:00 CET
Evaluation process by the partners (including eventual consensus meetings)	October-November 2024
Final list with selected companies	December 2024

5. Compliance with the BRIDGESMEs Regulations

The Call for Expression of Interest Regulations (hereinafter referred to as the "Regulations") constitute the main legal framework governing the activities of the BRIDGESMEs and provide detailed guidelines and obligations for participants. It is mandatory for all potential participants to carefully review and comply with the Regulations in order to be eligible to participate in this Notice. The terms and definitions contained in this Notice have their specified meanings in the Regulations. By submitting their application, participants implicitly acknowledge that they have read and understood the Regulations and agree to comply with its provisions. Failure to comply with the regulatory requirements outlined in the Regulations may result in exclusion from participating in this Notice and the loss of associated benefit.

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 of your personal data, please contact info@bridgesmes.eu.

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 pilot SMEs, interested parties are invited to contact our dedicated team at: chiron@aerospace-valley.com ; thual@aerospace-valley.com