FFG
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Bundesministerium
Innovation, Mobilität
und Infrastruktur

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: 6 OCTOBER 2026
VIENNA, MAY 2026

AI ECOSYSTEMS 2026

AI FOR TECH & AI FOR GREEN

HYBRID AI & GREEN AI

CALL GUIDELINE

VERSION 1.0

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1 KEY FACTS AT A GLANCE

A total funding of EUR 8.4 million is available under the Call "**AI Ecosystems 2026: Hybrid AI & Green AI"** (excluding Industry-related PhD projects).

The Guidelines for Cooperative R&D Projects will be applied for this call. **The following conditions apply additionally:**

- Project type: Only projects in the research category "Industrial Research" are eligible for submission
- Consortium: Each consortium must include at least two companies (Note: the consortium conditions set out in the Guidelines for Cooperative R&D Projects must also be met)
- Maximum funding per project: EUR 1 million

Table 1: Overview of funding instruments available

Funding instrument	Short description	Funding (€)	Funding rate	Duration (months)	Cooperation required
Cooperative R&D Project – Industrial Research	Cooperative Research and Development Projects are carried out by several consortium partners working together on a joint project with defined R&D goals.	min. 100,000 to max. 1 million	max. 85 %	max. 36	yes, min. 2 companies
Industry-related PhD Projects[1]	An Industry-related PhD Projects is carried out by a doctoral candidate together with a company or non-university research institution and a university.	max. 110,000	max. 50 %	min. 24 to max. 36	no

[1] The "Industry-related PhD Projects 2026" Call supports researchers working on research questions in science and engineering or current topics of applied research relating to the 'triple transition'. Please note that there is a separate Call Guideline for these topics: https://www.ffg.at/en/callindustrienahe-dissertationen-2026-industrial-phd

Table 2: Budget – Deadlines – Contact

Further information	Details
Total budget	EUR 8.4 million
Submission deadline	6 October 2026 (12:00 noon)
Language	**English**
Contacts for questions regarding content	Bao-Chau Pham, T 057755-5029; E: bao-chau.pham@ffg.at Markus Proske, T 057755-5023; E markus.proske@ffg.at
Contacts for questions regarding cost	Erwin Eckhart, T: 057755-6095; E: erwin.eckhart@ffg.at Alexander Glechner, T: 057755-6082; E: alexander.glechner@ffg.at
Kick-off and matchmaking event	18 June 2026, Vienna Register at: https://www.ffg.at/ai-oekosysteme-2026-matchmaking
Online information	https://www.ffg.at/ai-oekosysteme-2026 and https://www.ffg.at/en/callindustrienahe-dissertationen-2026-industrial-phd
Submission portal	https://ecall.ffg.at

Diverse teams

Teams which are diverse in composition offer a range of perspectives, encouraging them to be more innovative and productive. A team which is diverse, in terms of gender and background, etc., can raise the quality of projects and consequently their research, products, and services. The impacts of project outcomes on people are taken into account by considering the various demands of a product in its use or manufacture. Teams which include a variety of perspectives, experiences, worldviews, and skills are key to developing effective solutions for society and the economy. The FFG offers support through funding. Information is available on the website: https://www.ffg.at/gleichstellung#Foerdermoeglichkeiten_Vielfalt

2 OBJECTIVES OF THE CALL

This Call addresses issues in the field of "Digital and Key Technologies". A technology campaign for applied research and technology development has been established as part of the RTI Strategy 2030. The aim is to strengthen the research and development of key technologies in the field of digitalisation, and in particular to support the development of new digital products and services.

Digital technologies, in particular artificial intelligence (AI), are key enablers of the digital and green transformation. The Federal Ministry for Innovation, Mobility and Infrastructure (BMIMI) has for many years supported research and development of digital technologies in the fields of AI for Tech and AI for Green. This year, AI for Tech will once again focus on Hybrid AI, while AI for Green will address the new topic of Green AI. It is no longer aimed at the use of AI for green transformation objectives, but rather at making AI technology itself more sustainable.

The Call addresses the following objectives:

- **Technology sovereignty and open technology solutions**
  Digital and key technologies should be enhanced in order to develop and strengthen European value networks. The aim is to drive the development of cutting-edge technologies and expand existing areas of strength.

- **Achieving technology acceptance**
  The aim is to create acceptance for the application of digital and key technologies, and to encourage the establishment and further development of flexible and collaborative creative ecosystems. These should be designed to support collaboration between different actors and thus promote the development and use of digital and key technologies.

- **Competence and capacity building**
  A strong focus is on developing competencies and capacities, supporting young talent, and promoting diversity and gender equality in the field of digital and key technologies. This provides a multi-perspective view on the project and the resulting products.

- **Tackling societal challenges**
  Promoting digital and key technologies helps tackle societal challenges such as climate and demographic change, and strengthen democracy and social resilience. The focus here lies on the green and digital transformation of specific sectors/industries with a high potential for sustainable development.

- **Strengthening international networking**
  International networking, both within and beyond Europe, should be strengthened. The intention is to generate knowledge and facilitate know-how transfer, and to improve the access of Austrian RTI players to European and international markets.

Industry-related PhD projects are offered as part of a separate Call and can be submitted for topics including digital technologies and AI.

3 CALL TOPICS

"AI system means a machine-based system that is designed to operate with varying levels of autonomy and that may exhibit adaptiveness after deployment, and that, for explicit or implicit objectives, infers, from the input it receives, how to generate outputs such as predictions, content, recommendations, or decisions that can influence physical or virtual environments."

European Artificial Intelligence Act

In recent years, AI has become one of the most significant technologies of our time. It is being intensively examined in light of its potential range of applications and impact. Although AI methods have been used in research, industry, and business for decades, the emergence and rapid dissemination of generative models has squarely positioned this technology within general social discourse. Given its easy accessibility and widespread availability, there appear to be virtually no limits to the creative applications to which AI can be put. However, as AI is being applied even more broadly and increasingly integrated into existing processes, its explainability and verifiability have become ever more important. At the same time, greater use of AI brings an associated rise in energy and resource consumption which represents a key environmental challenge.

The current AI Ecosystems 2026 call is designed to further explore the potential of AI and to drive research into AI technologies. In addition, the call addresses emerging environmental challenges through a focus on resource-efficient developments. Consequently, submitted projects must relate to one of these two call topics.

An explicit objective of both call topics is to pursue the substantial technological development or advancement of core AI technologies. Only projects whose innovative content lies in overcoming technological barriers in the core area of AI and advancing the state-of-the-art are eligible for funding.
Simply adapting and applying existing models to specific use cases, vertical markets (such as energy, production, mobility, ...), or heterogeneous data is **not** sufficient.

Table 3: Indicative allocation of funding to individual call topics

Call topic	Maximum funding (€)
Hybrid AI	4.2 million
Green AI	4.2 million

3.1 Hybrid AI – symbolic and subsymbolic AI

Symbolic AI uses logical, rule-based systems to link facts and events, creating knowledge that can be read and processed by machines. This approach is important for creating semantic representations and improving decision-making processes, including through processes of symbolic machine learning. Subsymbolic (non-symbolic) AI primarily includes methods of subsymbolic machine learning, such as deep learning and neural networks, that identify complex patterns in large amounts of training data to derive statistically sound conclusions and decisions. Hybrid AI is understood as the structured combination of methods of both symbolic and subsymbolic AI.

Possible advantages of hybrid approaches:

- Use of prior knowledge
- Use of causal knowledge in modelling
- Better explainability and interpretability of AI systems
- Greater reliability and increased security of AI systems
- Easier verification of AI systems
- Certification of AI systems

The focus of this call topic lies in research-intensive technology development within the framework of cooperative R&D projects involving the research, development, and testing of platforms, tools, and methods for AI systems that combine and exploit the advantages of both symbolic and subsymbolic AI.

In basic research, hybrid AI is addressed in the "Bilateral AI" research project which has been awarded a Cluster of Excellence (CoE) by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF). The third Hybrid AI call as part of AI Ecosystems 2026 is designed to address applied research and cooperation with companies.

The call topic includes systems for developing, continuously adapting, applying, and testing hybrid AI systems, and developing and researching methods to create hybrid AI systems which comply with the EU AI Act. A key consideration lies in creating human-centred AI systems designed to meet the needs and requirements of users.

Energy efficiency is not the focus of this call but is addressed in the Green AI call topic in section 3.2.

Instrument:

- Cooperative R&D Projects subject to the restrictions mentioned in section 1

3.2 Green AI

AI can be used in a wide range of applications in almost all social and economic contexts, but at the same time brings with it considerable environmental challenges. A key lever for increasing the sustainability of AI is to reduce the energy consumption of AI systems. While public attention often focuses on the training phase of complex models, model inferences, which are performed billions of times a day in applications around the world, represent the far more significant share of the cumulative total energy consumption. Low energy consumption is not only an environmental requirement, but considering the high energy costs in Europe, also a direct prerequisite for economic competitiveness.

Potential benefits of energy-efficient approaches:

- Improves competitiveness through lower operating costs
- Enables AI applications in resource-constrained systems (Edge, Embedded)
- Reduces the ecological footprint of AI systems
- Contributes to meeting regulatory requirements in the field of sustainability

The focus of the Green AI call topic lies in concepts, methods, and technologies that significantly improve the energy efficiency of AI systems throughout their life cycle.

Topics for proposals could include:

- Pruning approaches: Methods to reduce model complexity by removing redundant parameters or connections without significantly impairing prediction quality.
- Quantisation: Reduction of the numerical precision of weights and activations in neural networks (e.g., from Float32 to 8, 4 or fewer bits) to significantly reduce memory requirements and computational effort.
- Data-centric AI for resource optimisation: Instead of training models on ever larger data sets, the focus here is on the quality and selection of data to identify the smallest possible but most informative data set, thus saving training time and computational effort.
- Knowledge distillation, transfer learning, and model recycling: Promote approaches that build on already trained models and use methods to reduce training effort, such as transfer learning, few-shot and zero-shot learning, curriculum learning, or synthetic data generation, to reduce the need for data requests.
- Neuromorphic computing: Use of software and hardware architectures inspired by the human brain (e.g., spiking neural networks or specially optimised chips) that achieve extremely high energy efficiency through parallel and event-driven processing.
- AI on the Edge and Embedded AI: Approaches that run AI models directly on edge devices or embedded systems, such as in production environments, robotics, satellites, IoT, or automotive engineering. Processing takes place locally, without energy-intensive transmission and processing in the cloud.

- Domain-aware machine learning: Integration of physical laws, expert knowledge or domain-specific boundary conditions into the modelling to reduce the amount of data required and the training duration.
- Method and tool development: Research into (automated) tools to measure the ecological footprint over the entire life cycle as well as development of more energy-efficient programming paradigms and compiler technologies.

Instrument:

- Cooperative R&D Projects subject to the restrictions mentioned in section 1

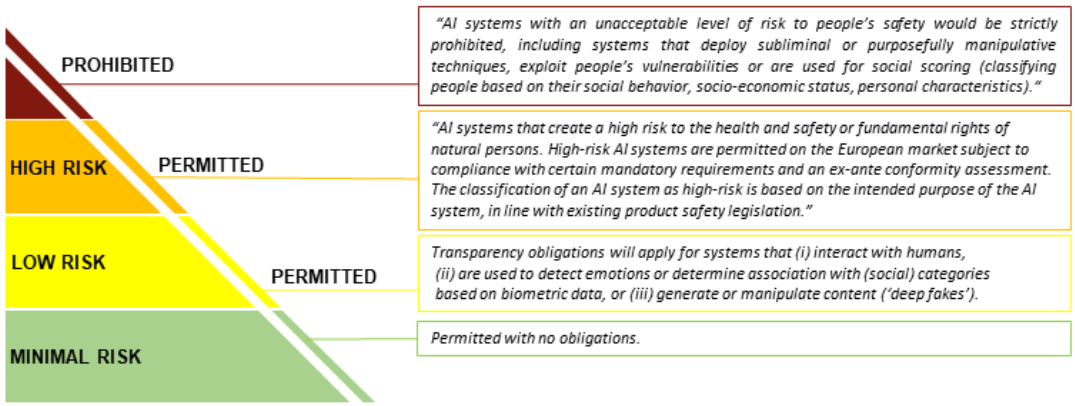
4 PROJECT REQUIREMENTS

In section 1.1 (“Motivation”) of the application form, applicants are required to demonstrate that their project has been planned in accordance with the EU AI Act, technological sovereignty and resource efficiency, and taking into account equality and (where applicable) existing initiatives and projects.

4.1 European guidelines – the European Union's Artificial Intelligence Act (EU AI Act)

The European Union’s EU AI Act has created a technological, ethical and legal basis which allows people and enterprises not only to use artificial intelligence (AI) without danger, but also to benefit from the advantages it offers. AI development should be designed to uphold the functioning of the markets and the public sector and to protect fundamental human rights. With the gradual entry into force of the AI Act, general rules will apply to all AI systems made available within the European Union. In addition to transparency and reliability obligations, the AI Act defines four categories of AI systems (unacceptable risk, high risk, low risk, minimal risk) in accordance with their potential risk to democratic society and the safety of natural persons.

Figure 1: Schematic representation of the risk assessment of AI systems in the EU AI Act



For the use of generative AI, see also the "Guidelines on the responsible use of generative AI in research developed by the European Research Area Forum".

While research projects are generally excluded from the scope of the Act, given the prospects of subsequent exploitation, projects submitted for funding must still take into account the guidelines of the EU AI Act (and, if applicable, additional provisions) and the ethics guidelines for trustworthy AI.

4.2 Use of synergies and freely available data sources

A large number of initiatives and projects already exist within the context of this call. Applicants are encouraged to build on existing knowledge and explore possible collaborations or synergies. The use of freely available data sources (e.g., EU space programme/Copernicus) should be examined where appropriate in the context of the project.

Further information and data sources:

- FFG Project Database (in particular AI for Tech and AI for Green)
- Flagship Projects FAIR-AI and DOMINO
- AI Factory AUSTRIA
- Bilateral AI (FWF Cluster of Excellence)
- GAINS – Green AI for Innovation and Sustainability

4.3 Technology sovereignty

Research and development in digital technologies must be set in the context of European technological sovereignty. Therefore, European developments must be considered and used where appropriate. By opening up new applications and application fields, technologies can help establish European technological sovereignty. Equally, external project dependencies must be listed in the risk analysis or the description of commercial exploitation. Examples of dependencies would include dependence on available data or components.

4.4 Gender dimension and diversity aspects

Depending on the project content, the human contribution to problem solving must also be considered, as a purely technical approach would be insufficient. Therefore, where relevant, the project content must consider diversity aspects (including gender) in order to reflect the diverse nature of humanity. A diverse team further supports meeting this requirement.

4.5 Exclusion criteria

Projects, which conduct research on technologies that can be used to restrict European fundamental rights and freedoms, e.g., surveillance of individuals, AI-supported censorship, are not eligible for funding.

4.6 Cost requirements

Cooperation with BMIMI support initiatives for funded cooperative R&D projects should be taken into account in the cost plan by including two working days for networking and mobilisation measures.

The applicable cost and accounting regulations are available in the Cost Guideline. In order to eliminate ambiguity regarding cost items for projects of this call, the key provisions are as follows:

- In the case of funding for travel expenses, the publication or, in justified special cases, research character of the activity must predominate. Costs for travel of a predominantly educational nature (e.g., participation in summer schools) or sales nature (e.g., visits to trade fairs) will not be recognised.
- Costs for marketing and customer acquisition are not eligible for funding in accordance with the Cost Guidelines.

5 CALL DOCUMENTS

Projects may only be submitted electronically via eCall.

The application consists of the following **online** elements, which must be entered in eCall under the following menu items:

- **Description of content** presents the content of the project.
- **Work plan** includes the work packages and elements of project management, such as time management plan (GANTT diagram), tasks, milestones, results.
- **Consortium** describes the expertise of the individual consortium members.
- **Cost and financing** describes all cost categories for each consortium member. The totals for each work package will be automatically displayed in the online work plan.

Annexes to the electronic application (where required)

All relevant documents for the call can be found in the Download Centre:

Table 4: Call documents – Funding

Funding instrument / other information	Call documents
Cooperative R&D Projects	– Guideline for Cooperative R&D Projects (5.2) – Declaration of SME Status (if required)
General cost regulations	– Cost Guideline (3.2) (cost recognition in FFG projects)

Please note: A Declaration of SME Status is required for associations, sole traders and foreign companies. In the template provided, applicants must (as far as possible) categorise their business for the last three years according to the SME definition.

6 FUNDING DECISION AND LEGAL BASIS

The FFG Management makes the **funding decision** based on the recommendation for funding provided by the evaluation committee.

This Call is based on the Guideline of the Österreichische Forschungsförderungsgesellschaft mbH for the Funding of Research, Technology, Development, and Innovation aimed at promoting digital and industrial key and aerospace technologies and innovations (FFG-Technologie-Richtlinie 2024-2026).

The company size shall be established in accordance with the corresponding SME definition specified in EU competition law. For more information go to the SME page on the FFG website.

All EU provisions shall be applicable as amended.

If you plan or carry out procurements for your FFG project, the relevant regulations must be strictly observed. Further information can be found on the FFG website – Procurements for funded projects.

7 ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

This section contains information about additional funding opportunities and services which you may find useful in connection with funding applications or funded projects.

7.1 FFG Project Database

The publicly accessible FFG Project Database provides the opportunity to publish brief information about funded projects and an overview of the project partners involved. This enables you to present your project and your project partners to the interested public. The database can also be used to search for cooperation partners.

Once funding is granted, the applicants are informed via eCall that they can publish brief information about their project in the FFG Project Database. The information will only be published if active consent is given in the eCall system.

For more information see the Project Database page of the FFG website.

7.2 BMIMI Open4Innovation

Additionally, the **open4innovation** platform of the Federal Ministry for Innovation, Mobility and Infrastructure (BMIMI) offers a knowledge base for companies, researchers, etc. (community support, detailed information, success stories, etc.).

7.3 Open Access publications

Research results obtained with the aid of public funding are to be put to the best use to provide maximum benefit to science, business, and society. The Open Access principle should therefore be followed where possible for peer-reviewed publications produced with the support of FFG funding. The principle is "as open as possible, as closed as necessary", which also applies in European funding schemes.

Publication costs are eligible for funding.

7.4 Handling project data – Data Management Plan

The preparation of a Data Management Plan (DMP) is recommended although not a mandatory part of this call.

A DMP is a management tool that supports the efficient and systematic handling of data generated in projects and helps with respect to data protection, copyright, and licensing.

A DMP describes,

- what data are collected, processed, or generated within a project
- how these data are handled in the project
- what methods and standards are applied
- how the data are stored and updated over the long term, and
- whether it is planned to make datasets available to third parties for reuse (i.e., open access to research data).

It is advisable to make research data that underpin peer-reviewed publications and whose publication is necessary for the reproducibility and verifiability of the published results openly available. In the event of publication, the data should be "findable, accessible, interoperable, and reusable". Storing data in established and internationally recognised repositories (see re3data or openDoar) is recommended in order to ensure broad access.

DMPs can be created, e.g., using the free tool DMP Online. The Guidelines on FAIR Data Management of the European Commission also provide assistance in this respect.

7.5 Additional FFG funding opportunities

Are you interested in other funding opportunities provided by the FFG?

The FFG **Funding Service** is the central contact point for your enquiries about FFG funding and advisory services. Please feel free to contact us, we are happy to help.

Contact: FFG Funding Service, T: +43 (0) 57755-0, E: foerderservice@ffg.at

Web: **https://www.ffg.at/foerderservice**

The following calls have a special focus on digital and key technologies:

Resource transition 2026: National research and development in the fields of circular economy and production technologies.

Key technologies in a production-related environment 2026: National research and development in the fields of robotics, advanced materials, photonics and quantum technologies.

Additional FFG funding options can be found here.

8 ANNEX: CHECKLIST FOR SUBMISSION

The formal check serves to examine the funding/financing application for accuracy and completeness. Please note: **If the formal requirements are not met and the deficiencies cannot be corrected, the funding application will be excluded from the further procedure and will be formally rejected without exception in accordance with the principle of equal treatment of applications.**

Table 5: Checklist for the formal check of funding applications

Criteria	*Items checked*	*Can deficiency be corrected?*	*Consequence*
The project description is complete.	The online project description must be completed in full.	*no*	Rejection for formal reasons
The correct language has been used.	**Language: English**	*no*	Rejection for formal reasons
The mandatory annexes specified in the call have been attached.	See Call Guidelines	*yes*	Correction via eCall after submission
Uploads to the master data in eCall (upload as pdf file)	Annual accounts (balance sheet, P&L account) of the past 2 financial years are available. Start-ups must present a business plan.	*yes*	Correction via eCall after submission
The funding applicant is eligible to submit an application.	See Guidelines of the funding instrument	*no*	Rejection for formal reasons
For consortia: The project partners are eligible to participate.	See Guidelines of the funding instrument	*no*	Rejection for formal reasons
Minimum requirements for the consortium	See Call Guidelines (at least two companies) and Guidelines of the funding instrument.	*no*	Rejection for formal reasons