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VERSION 1.0
SUBMISSION DEADLINE: 11 APRIL 2024 (12.00 CEST)
CALL 2024

AUSTRIAN SEMICONDUCTOR CHIPS COMPETENCE CENTRE (AT-C³)

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1 KEY FACTS AT A GLANCE

The aim of this call is to identify and select an Austrian candidate for a European network of Chips Competence Centres planned by the European Commission. National funding will only be granted to candidates that have also been selected at European level.

Call overview	Description
Short description	Establishment and operation of the Austrian Chips Competence Centre as part of the Chips for Europe Initiative
Funding instrument	Innovation Lab ¹
Eligible to submit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutions of research and knowledge dissemination (research organisations) as part of their non-economic activities • Non-commercial institutions as part of their non-economic activities
Maximum funding (€)	Max. 4 million (national) ²
Funding rate	Up to 50% national ³
Duration (months)	48
Cooperation required	No
Total budget (€)	4 million (national)
Deadline for mandatory preliminary meeting	8/3/2024
Submission deadline	11 April 2024 (12:00 CEST)
Language	English
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Online information	https://www.ffg.at/chips/chips-CC-Call24

¹ The funding instrument covers the national part of the funding. The European part of the funding comes from the Digital Europe Programme (Simple Grant) via the [Chips Joint Undertaking](#).

² Additional max. €4 million in EU funding

³ Additional max. 50% EU funding rate

The European Chips Act and its Chips for Europe initiative include, among others, setting up a network of national Chips Competence Centres for semiconductors. The initiative provides a maximum funding budget of €4 million for each member state in the Chips Joint Undertaking (Chips JU). This will be matched by national funding to the same amount provided by the Future Austria Fund (“Fonds Zukunft Österreich”)⁴ administered by the FFG. Consequently, a maximum budget of €8 million is available to set up and run the Austrian Chips Competence Centre. Submissions must be made electronically via the FFG [eCall](https://ecall.ffg.at/) system by the specified deadline <https://ecall.ffg.at/>. In a second stage, a submission is made to a [Chips JU](#) call.

2 THE EUROPEAN CHIPS ACT AND THE CHIPS FOR EUROPE INITIATIVE

The European Chips Act, proposed by the European Commission on 8 February 2022, proposes the development of a thriving semiconductor ecosystem and resilient supply chain, to build on Europe's strengths, address existing weaknesses, and establish measures to prepare, anticipate and respond to future supply chain disruptions⁵. It provides an opportunity for all Member States to act collectively to ensure the European Union's resilience and technological sovereignty in the field of semiconductor technologies.

The aim is to improve Europe's technological leadership, security of supply, and the ability to respond to crisis situations. These ambitions reflect the goal of capturing 20% of the global semiconductor market by 2030, in accordance with the goals of the Digital Compass Communication⁶.

The Chips for Europe Initiative is Pillar 1 of the European Chips Act, and designed to support technological capacity building and innovation in the Union. Large-scale infrastructures such as pilot lines and a design platform will be created to facilitate research and development, testing, experimentation, and validation of new technologies. It is intended that these new infrastructures will be available to all relevant EU stakeholders (SMEs, industry, researchers, designers) from the various vertical sectors.

Competence centres for semiconductors will play a key role in the Chips for Europe Initiative. These centres are designed to help companies, especially SMEs, develop and improve their design and development skills. The competence centres will also help users access other infrastructures set up under the initiative.

The competence centres will provide services to stakeholders in the semiconductor industry and are particularly aimed at start-ups and SMEs. This could take the form

⁴ [National Foundation](#)

⁵ COM(2022)45, 8 February 2022

⁶ COM(2021)118, 9 March 2021

of facilitating access to pilot lines and the European Virtual Design Platform, providing training and upskilling, support in the search for investors, leveraging existing local skills or tapping into relevant vertical sectors. Services should be provided on an open, transparent and non-discriminatory basis. Each competence centre should connect to the European network of semiconductor competence centres and act as an access point to other nodes in the network.

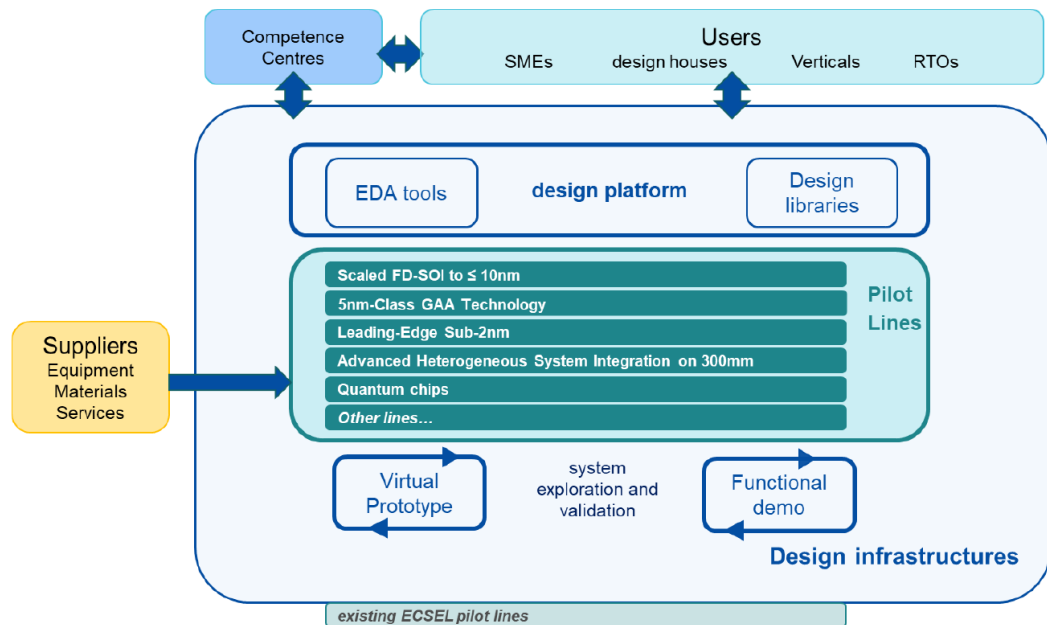


Illustration 1: Components of the Chips for Europe initiative

2.1 Activities of the Chips Competence Centres

Appendix 4 of the “multiannual work programme for the years 2023-2027”, Chips JU, GB 2023.58 – Appendix 4⁷, describes the possible activities and/or support activities of the Chips Competence Centres as follows:

- **Facilitate access to the design platform and to pilot lines by providing information and support on how to access the platform or the pilot lines when users do not have the knowledge or expertise to do so directly.**
- **Support interested users in developing semiconductor solutions (technology transfer) by supporting technology transfer activities at local/regional/national level and – where needed – at EU level.** Research activities as well as operation, administration or procurement of infrastructures are not within the scope of Chips CCs, but competence centres are expected to advise on such activities and support knowledge transfer e.g. from relevant R&I initiatives to the local semiconductor ecosystem. Support could also be in the form of matchmaking between a research organization and a user.

⁷ [Appendix 4](#)

- ***In addition, Chips CCs could grant facilitated access to experts in such areas as legal compliance and business development.*** They may offer assistance to SMEs in creating business plans and conducting market studies.

Providing (access to) training on skills: Advanced training on specific design and manufacturing skills and practices is often difficult to access for SMEs and other stakeholders. They need access to education services for development of skills in different disciplines but also for different audiences or levels (e.g. bachelor, masters level), access to top-level teachers, or support for the set-up of a credentials/micro-credentials framework. Chips CCs should support local and national training and skills development in the area of semiconductor technologies through face-to-face as well as online training (e.g. via MOOC platforms). Chips CCs should determine what is needed in their countries, should know the competences of other Chips CCs, and – where needed – provide trainings to other CCs ('train-the-trainer'). Trainings can be provided by CCs themselves, or by third parties hired by the centres. A variety of training models can be used, ranging from alternation model or cluster model, via on-the-job trainings and apprenticeships, to crash courses and mentoring programmes.

- ***Participate in the organization of a European Network of Chips Competence Centres (ENCCC) and facilitate the access to this network.*** Part of the resources of a Chips CC should be dedicated to building and extending this network, in collaboration with a Coordination and Support Action (see Chips-CCC-2: Support to the European Network of Chips Competence Centres). Chips CCs should help stakeholders, especially smaller companies such as SMEs and start-ups, to connect to other competence centres within the overall network of competence centres. They should provide stakeholders with information on relevant competences in the network as well as on national and international programs, companies, and research centres in semiconductors. A Chips CC should help a stakeholder to connect to the right competence centres within the overall network of competence centres, if the local/national Chips CC does not have the right competences to support the stakeholder. In return, a Chips CC will support stakeholders from other regions and countries that need its (specialised) expertise through the network of competence centres.

- ***Chips CC should act as entry points to other European initiatives, such as the network of European Digital Innovation Hubs, HPC competence centres, cybersecurity centres, etc.*** The goal is to ensure that national stakeholders have access to the best available expertise and support in Europe, by matching stakeholders' needs with the available expertise in the network of competence centres. Such expertise may be the specialisation of another competence centre and be accessible through the ENCCC.

- ***Promoting the Chips Fund and facilitating access to venture capital:*** SMEs and startups are often faced with insufficient financial support and have difficulties to get loans, equity, and/or grants. In particular, startups experience difficulties in managing resources and investment at the initial stage.

• **Awareness raising, promoting services, promoting success stories:** *the services offered by Chips CCs may be new and may not be well recognised in the beginning. Therefore, Chips CCs need to raise awareness about their services, need to promote their services, and may need to develop an outreach program to promote the Chips CC services to potential user companies, esp. smaller enterprises. Chips CCs may need to go to many events in their countries to increase familiarity of their services with their target customers. They may need to target specific vertical sectors. They may need to promote success stories that show how their services benefit their customers. They may need to hire staff with the right soft skills to interact with customers and provide the interface between technical Chips CC staff and customers.*

3 CALL SPECIFICATIONS

3.1 Objective of the call

The primary objective of this call is to select an organisation or consortium to establish and run the Austrian Chips Competence Centre (AT-C³). The procedure stipulates that after selection and nomination of the national candidate, there will be a selection procedure ("restricted call") by the Chips JU. In this step, the national candidate will be evaluated in terms of its ability to fulfil the requirements from a European perspective. The national funding contract will only enter into force following a positive outcome (more details on the European call will be published at a later date).

Applicants must meet the general requirements for a Chips Competence Centre, as described in section 2, and clearly demonstrate their suitability in the funding application.

3.2 Call requirements

The future Austrian Chips Competence Centre will need to meet specific requirements, including the following:

- The AT-C³ is a single organisation or a consortium of organisations with complementary expertise. Applicants for funding should be experts in their chosen field, yet simultaneously address the Austrian semiconductor industry's broad spectrum of needs. The AT-C³ should cover one or more of the following specialisms:
 - Power electronics
 - Sensing technologies
 - Open software vehicle platform
 - Energy efficient processing and computing
 - Developing and testing of trustable AI based systems
 - Next generation of hybrid integration

- Secure connectivity and communication technologies
- The AT-C³ must be established as an organisation with adequate visibility for national and local stakeholders.
- The AT-C³ promotes the use of semiconductor technologies with the aim of increasing the ability of Austria's semiconductor industry to innovate and compete.
- It is recommended that the AT-C³ be built on existing organisations and structures in order to exploit synergies while avoiding duplication.
- The AT-C³ should consider developments in quantum technologies which are relevant to the semiconductor industry and promote the participation/use of the Austrian community in potential quantum chip pilot lines.
- The AT-C³ services are designed for use by companies (preferably local/national SMEs and start-ups) as well as research and scientific institutions at regional, national and European level. Large companies and public institutions are also permitted.
- Access to the AT-C³ services should be provided on an open, transparent, and non-discriminatory basis.
- AT-C³ services are available to SMEs and publicly funded organisations free of charge or at reduced prices. Large companies will be charged market prices or the actual costs incurred.
- The AT-C³ must play an active role in the network of European Chips Competence Centres.
- AT-C³ offerings and services must be communicated in German and English.
- Annual funding for the AT-C³ may not exceed two million euros: a maximum of one million euros from national funding, and one million euros from European funding.
- The AT-C³ should employ semiconductor specialists, generally on full-time contracts, whose expertise is relevant to the Austrian semiconductor industry landscape. Subcontracting to experts with complementary expertise is possible.
- The AT-C³ should be an independent organisation. Staff should not work under external supervision.
- Applications to the Chips Fund (see 2.1, last bullet point) is desirable.

The degree to which the applicant organisation fulfils the above points is part of the evaluation criteria (e.g. "Relevance to the call " and "Suitability of the project partners") (see **Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden.**).

3.3 How is the AT-C³ financed?

The AT-C³ Innovation Lab is co-financed from national and European funds. Consequently, both national and EU funding rules apply. The cost base is the same and may only be charged once.

EU funding is provided in the form of grants issued under the Digital Europe Programme. The following cost items are eligible for funding:

- Personnel costs for qualified competence centre employees who provide the services outlined above. Costs for subcontracting to specialists may also be included.
- Procurement and/or depreciation costs for equipment and facilities, both hardware and software.
- Travel allowances for competence centre staff and local stakeholders to enable collaboration with other competence centres.

Details are set out in the European Grant Agreement.

The national funding follows the rules⁸ of the FFG, which are described in detail in the following sections.

The work plan must include a breakdown of the activities of all partners. The AT-C³ must establish a monitoring system to allow a detailed assessment of its activities and avoid double financing.

3.4 Selection process

The selection process consists of two main steps. The first is the selection of the national candidates (i.e., potential organisation or consortium) for the AT-C³. This requires applicants to undergo a national selection process. The evaluation committee makes a funding recommendation. The FFG management then makes its funding decision based on the recommendation of the evaluation committee and selects the candidate for the AT-C³. In the second step, the selected candidate is subjected to a quality assessment by the Chips JU.

The Chips JU quality assessment requires candidates to meet the following minimum requirements:

- Appropriate knowledge and skills to provide the services indicated in the sections above.
- Appropriate management capacities, personnel and infrastructure required to provide the services indicated in the sections above.
- Operational and legal capacity to comply with the administration, contractual and financial management rules set forth in the Grant Agreement.
- Appropriate financial viability (managing the funds granted).

It must be possible to check that the candidates meet these requirements for the national submissions. The European selection criteria are provided as an Annex to this document (section 10.2).

The selected applicants will sign a grant agreement with the Chips JU and a national funding contract with the FFG.

3.5 Special characteristics of the funding instrument

⁸ [Cost Guideline](#)

The funding instrument is an Innovation Lab. The following sections describe the instrument in detail. The terms competence centre and innovation lab are used interchangeably.

The following applies specifically to this call:

- The call is aimed exclusively at non-commercial Austrian partners.
- The evaluation process includes a hearing with the funding applicants.
- Project monitoring may involve an external evaluation after two years of the project. Project monitoring should be coordinated between the national and European levels as far as possible.

3.6 Services of the AT-C³ (falling under the de minimis⁹ Regulation)

During the funding period, an AT-C³ will provide services to fulfil the tasks listed in sections 2.1 and 3.1.

The corresponding **de minimis Regulation** (see also section **Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden.**) applies to **services provided to companies and commercial organisations within public administration**.

The services offered by the AT-C³ must be grouped by topics and made publicly accessible. The costs of each service must be published in publicly-accessible price lists. The relevant guidelines (see section **Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden.**) must be adhered to in determining the relevant prices.

AT-C³ services that are **open and accessible to the entire target group** must be offered free of charge and listed accordingly ("0 EUR" in the price list). The documents (e.g. training materials), results, etc., relating to these free services must be made publicly available on the AT-C³ platform.

The following 3 options apply for services with **higher prices** or **specific services for individual** companies/commercial organisations within public administration (e.g., concept development, customised development activities,¹⁰ transfer support, etc.):

- 1 The company is charged a fee which corresponds to the value of the service as listed in the price list and can be viewed in the publicly-accessible price lists. In this case, the service does not constitute indirect aid to the company.
- 2 The range of services is provided free of charge for the company. This is regarded as indirect aid to the company and accordingly must be shown as aid under the applicable de minimis Regulation. The de minimis threshold only applies to a maximum of 50% (depending on the funding rate) of the prices as shown in the price list, as EC funding is not subject to European state aid law.
- 3 The company is charged a fee as partial reimbursement of the costs. The price reduction (difference between the price as stated on the price list and the reimbursement fee) is regarded as indirect aid to the company and accordingly shown as aid in accordance with the applicable de minimis Regulation. As EC funding is not subject to European state aid law, only a maximum of 50%

⁹ COMMISSION REGULATION (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union OJ L 187/1 of 26.6.2014 as amended by Regulation (EU) 2023/1315, OJ L 167/1 of 30.06.2023

[De minimis aid](#)

¹⁰ This does not include AT-C³ participation in research and development projects.

(depending on the funding rate) of the difference between the partial reimbursement of costs and the price stated in the price list is relevant for the call de minimis threshold.

Examples of calculations for each of these three options are shown in Infobox 1 below:

Infobox 1: Examples of calculations for indirect aid to companies



The "Digital Twin" course is listed at EUR 1,200 in the AT-C³ price list (funding rate = 50%).

- **Option 1:** Company A has exhausted the de minimis account and pays the full course price of EUR 1,200. This is not indirect aid.
- **Option 2:** Company B has not yet exhausted the de minimis account and attends the course free of charge. Accordingly, EUR 600 in indirect aid is booked to the company's de minimis account.
- **Option 3:** Company C has not yet exhausted the de minimis account and attends the course at a reduced price of EUR 800. Accordingly, EUR 200 is booked to the company's de minimis account.

In order to benefit from the indirect aid, i.e., the free or reduced-cost services provided by the AT-C³, the companies/commercial organisations within the public administration must comply with the requirements of the applicable de minimis Regulation – **this must be checked accordingly by the AT-C³.**

The AT-C³ must ensure that **self-disclosures are obtained from the beneficiaries** declaring that there have been no violations of the applicable de minimis Regulation. The aid received by each company/commercial organisation within the public administration from de minimis programmes over the last 3 tax years (financial years) must be determined, monitored and documented. The corresponding de minimis ceiling must not be exceeded. Where the **de minimis threshold is exceeded**, the **corresponding fee must be charged**.

Only companies and commercial organisations within public administration that meet the requirements and conditions of the applicable de minimis Regulation, and those that have not exceeded the ceiling or will not exceed the ceiling when using the AT-C³ service, may benefit from the indirect aid in the form of free/reduced-cost AT-C³ services.

The self-disclosure template will be provided by the FFG on request.

4 REQUIREMENTS

4.1 What are Innovation Labs?

Innovation Labs¹¹ as specified in this funding instrument offer a productive environment for innovation, networking, research and knowledge transfer. They provide companies, research organisations and other institutions or individuals active in innovation with tangible and intangible infrastructure. Innovation Labs are designed to encourage the shared use of facilities and contribute to collaboration between companies and other facilities in order to promote innovation and new forms of collaboration.

Selected characteristics of Innovation Labs:

- Innovation Labs represent innovation platforms and provide the tangible and intangible RTI infrastructure required to support **user-centred innovation projects**¹² and the translation of research results into marketable products and services
- Innovation Labs promote the development of innovation expertise and **knowledge transfer**
- Innovation Labs must be open to several users and access must be granted on a **transparent and non-discriminatory basis**¹³
- Innovation Labs under this Call are **designed for the long term** with a funding period of 4 years.

Innovation Labs do not include the following:

- Existing project clusters
- Pure project offices
- Highly standardised test environments for approval procedures, e.g. clinical trials

These requirements must be met:

- The maximum funding period is 4 years.
- The maximum national funding is EUR 4 million.
- The operating organisation/consortium leader has a permanent establishment in Austria.
- The operating organisation/consortium leader acts as the contact for the FFG.
- The operating organisation/consortium leader submits the funding application.

¹¹ Innovation Labs are innovation clusters as defined in the [General Block Exemption Regulation](#), Regulation (EU) No. 651/2014 as amended from time to time.

¹² For the purpose of this funding instrument, innovation projects mean specific innovation activities carried out by Innovation Lab users using services offered by the Innovation Lab.

¹³ Non-discriminatory access means that the Innovation Lab's premises, facilities, information and services can be accessed by all potential users without any unjustified discrimination or preferential treatment.

4.2 What organisational requirements must be met by an AT-C³ Innovation Lab?

When considering the organisational structure of an Innovation Lab, a distinction is made between the roles of owner and operator:

- The **owner** owns the real-life development environment of the Innovation Lab. The owner may be granted **investment aid** (see section **Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden.**) for the establishment or expansion of the Innovation Lab.
- The **operator** operates the real-life development environment of the Innovation Lab. It may be granted **operating aid** (see section **Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden.**) for the operation of the Innovation Lab.

At least one organisation must assume the role of operator in the organisational structure of an Innovation lab. The operator may be either a **single legal entity based in Austria (operating organisation)** or a **consortium**.

Innovation Labs may also be operated without an owner, provided that the necessary infrastructure is available (such Innovation Labs are only eligible for operating aid). If the Innovation Lab applies for investment aid, the relevant applicant organisation of the consortium must assume the role of owner.

Ownership must be evidenced. If ownership is based on a legal act existing at the time of submission, this legal act must be presented (no leasing). If ownership arises during the course of the project, the relevant evidence must be presented via legal act immediately (together with the next report).

If one organisation applies for both operating and investment aid, that organisation assumes the roles of both operator and owner.

Note: **Once the funding contract has been concluded, it is no longer possible to change the requested role assignment (operator and/or owner).**

The AT-C³ (Innovation Lab) may be submitted as an **individual project** or as a **consortium project**:

- Individual project: These projects are submitted by an operating organisation which may also assume the role of owner. In the event of infrastructure funding (investment aid), the operating organisation must also assume the role of owner.
- Consortium project: At least one consortium member must assume the role of operator and may also assume the role of owner. Any other consortium member may assume the role of operator, owner or both. Investment aid may only be granted to the owner.

4.3 What are the requirements for establishment/expansion and operation?

The funding period of the AT-C³ Innovation Lab is a maximum of 4 years and is divided into establishment/expansion and operation phases. The applicant must indicate in the application when the establishment/expansion phase (establishment/expansion of organisational structure, competences and infrastructure) of the Innovation Lab will be completed and when it will be ready for use.

Funding is basically granted for the entire duration of the Innovation Lab (i.e. establishment/expansion and operation) subject to the outcome of any reviews (see section 7).

The funding application must include an **operating concept** for the entire planned duration of the Innovation Lab (this may exceed the funding period).

The **operating concept** must include the following points:

Description of the **innovation fields** (what thematic areas should be addressed by future innovation projects?)

Personnel and resource plan for the establishment/expansion and operation of the Innovation Lab.

Users, including assessment of demand and need

Planned services to be provided by the Innovation Lab

Planned and available **infrastructure** and its use for the Innovation Lab

Financing structure

Access rules including pricing

Capacity planning for potential innovation projects

Risk planning (including preventative measures)

Planned measures to **publicise** the services offered by the Innovation Lab

Access to and use of the Innovation Lab must generally be open to all and granted on a **transparent and non-discriminatory basis**.

4.4 What are the requirements for operating organisations/consortia?

Option 1:

The application may be submitted as an individual project if the operating organisation is a single legal entity based in Austria. The operating organisation may be newly established in Austria for this purpose. Companies in the course of formation may submit an application, but must exist as a legal entity at the time of drafting the funding contract. Costs incurred by the establishment of an operating organisation are not eligible for funding.

Option 2:

The application may also be submitted as a consortium project. The consortium leader submits the application and represents the consortium towards the FFG. The other members are involved as consortium members.

Both the consortium leader and all consortium members must exist as legal entities in Austria at the time of drafting the funding contract and the roles of the individual partners must be indicated in the application at the time of submission.

4.5 What are the obligations of the operating organisation/consortium?

The operating organisation (individual project) or consortium leader (consortium project) is responsible for submitting the funding application to the FFG as well as for the management of the AT-C³ Innovation Lab and communication with the FFG throughout the term of the Innovation Lab. The operating organisation or consortium leader warrants to the FFG:

- that the costs charged can be clearly attributed to the Innovation Lab;
- that the establishment/expansion and thematic orientation of the Innovation Lab are in accordance with the approved application and that any alterations have been notified and approved in good time; and
- that the accounts, reports and monitoring are complete and have been prepared in accordance with the provisions of the relevant funding and programme guidelines.

In the event of consortium projects, the **consortium leader** additionally undertakes to:

- review the accounts, reports and monitoring of the consortium members;
- manage and distribute the funding granted;
- ensure that a legally valid cooperation agreement has been concluded prior to the start of the project, in which all the regulations required by Recital 28 of the [Community framework for state aid for research and development and innovation 2022](#) (OJ 2022/C 414 of 28/10/2022) have been agreed.

4.6 Who is eligible to receive funding?

Legal entities that are not part of the Austrian federal administration are eligible to receive funding:

- Institutions of research and knowledge dissemination (research organisations) as part of their non-economic activities
 - Universities¹⁴
 - Universities of applied sciences
 - Non-university research institutions
 - Technology transfer institutions, innovation agents and other research-oriented organisations (e.g. cluster initiatives, associations with a relevant purpose)
- Non-commercial institutions as part of their non-economic activities, including:
 - Local authorities and autonomous bodies (Note: Activities of local authorities falling within their statutory mandate are not eligible for funding)

¹⁴ The smallest organisational unit that can participate on behalf of a university is the university institute or a comparable organisational unit pursuant to the University Organisation Act (UOG 2002/§ 20). The participating organisational unit (institute or comparable unit) must be duly authorised according to UOG 2002/§ 27. Subordinate organisational units (e.g. working groups) are not eligible to submit an application.

- Other, e.g. non-profit making organisations (NPOs)¹⁵

Eligible to participate, but not eligible for funding:

- Sub-contractors (third-party services):
 - These are third-party service providers who provide defined services for the Innovation Lab, which are reported under “Third-party costs” in the cost accounts of the funding recipient.
 - They are not consortium members and are not entitled to use the project results.

Not eligible to participate:

Organisations which have substantially contributed to the evaluation or design of a funding measure related to the specific call in the past three years on behalf of the FFG or the funding organisation, are not allowed to participate in the call in any way for reasons of incompatibility.

If this concerns different units of an organisation, a participation in this specific call must be coordinated with the FFG Call Management. In any case, the organisation must demonstrate that there is no conflict of interest.

The FFG reserves the right to exclude applicants on the grounds of incompatibility.

4.7 How much support is granted?

Support is paid in the form of **non-repayable grants**.

The national funding rate amounts to max. 50% of the eligible costs. The European funding rate also amounts to max. 50% of the eligible costs.

The maximum national funding amount for an Innovation Lab is 4 million euros, of which a maximum of 50% may be used for investments (acquisition of tangible and intangible assets).

The maximum European funding is 4 million euros.

4.8 What are the requirements for a non-commercially used and managed Innovation Lab?

The operating organisation/consortium members operate the Innovation Lab as part of their non-economic activities. The Innovation Lab provides non-economic services if there are no comparable services available on the market.

Non-commercially run Innovation Labs may also carry out economic activities as ancillary activities, provided that they are limited in scope, i.e.:

- the ancillary activity involves the same input (e.g. personnel, equipment, etc.) as the non-economic activity and does not exceed 20% of the total annual capacity (on a cost basis in terms of the eligible project costs) of the Innovation Lab
- and**
- is directly related to and necessary for the operation of the Innovation Lab,

¹⁵ “Non-profit making organisations” do not distribute profits to their owners, members or other natural persons or legal entities in accordance with their legal status or articles of association.

or

– is intrinsically linked to the main non-economic activity.

In the event of commercial use, the character and extent of such use must be presented in a transparent manner in the annual monitoring report.

Non-commercial Innovation Labs may apply for additional public support from other sources (e.g. financing from the global budget/target and performance agreement of universities or other subsidies, e.g. from a regional government).

Separate accounts must be maintained for the reporting of non-economic activities.

The operating costs, investment costs and potential income must also be reported separately. All income must be reinvested in the primary activities of the Innovation Lab in accordance with the principles of a non-profit making organisation (NPO).

4.9 Can organisations from outside Austria participate?

Organisations from outside Austria are not allowed to participate in this call as consortium partners, but they may act as subcontractors. Applicants are required to provide evidence of the need for foreign subcontractors in the application.

4.10 What costs are eligible?

The AT-C³ Innovation Lab is co-financed from national and European funds. Consequently, both national and EU funding rules apply. The cost base is the same and may only be charged once.

For costs to be eligible for funding they must be:

- directly allocable to the **establishment or operation** of the AT-C³ Innovation Lab;
- incurred by the operating organisation/consortium members during the **funding period**;
- in accordance with the **funding contract**,
- evidenced by **cost receipts**;
- plausibly documented for the proportional use of **assets**.

Eligible costs must generally be related to:

- the **establishment** of new structures and/or further development of existing structures for the Innovation Lab;
- the **operation, management and administration** of the Innovation Lab;
- activities aimed at increasing the **visibility** and effectiveness of the Innovation Lab; activities aimed at inviting new companies or institutions to participate in the Innovation Lab;
- activities of thematic **quality assurance**, such as documentation, reports, etc.
- the organisation of continuing education activities, workshops and conferences aimed to promote **knowledge transfer** (both internal and external), networking and transnational cooperation, the **focus areas** specified in the Chips Act (see section 2).

The following additional requirements apply:

- **Operating aid** may only be granted to the operator for costs incurred by the operation of the Competence Centre. Operating aid for the Competence Centre is calculated based on the eligible costs of personnel and infrastructure use (proportional project use, machine use, leasing), costs of materials, third-party costs and travel costs, hereinafter referred to as **operating costs**. The costs must be accounted for in accordance with the applicable Cost Guideline. Overhead costs are capped in accordance with the applicable Cost Guideline.
- EU funding is provided through the Digital Europe Programme.
- National funding is subject to the applicable state aid provisions. Indirect state aid to customers (SMEs) of the Competence Centre must be excluded in any case. Consequently, the Competence Centre must charge reasonable costs for individual services, while non-specific/non-individual services must be offered free of charge.
- The Competence Centre must put in place a monitoring system that enables a detailed evaluation of its activities and prevents double funding.
- **Investment aid** may only be granted to the owner for **investment costs** incurred by the establishment or expansion of the Competence Centre.
 - Investment costs in tangible and intangible assets may be charged in full in the year of acquisition.
 - There is no overhead allowance.
 - Please note that R&D infrastructure acquisition costs can only be charged if documentary evidence is provided (original receipts with clear allocation).
 - Work (e.g. acquisition) may not be started until the funding application has been submitted to the EC.
 - Costs may not be charged until the start of the AT-C³ project has been approved by the EC.

The [Cost Guideline](#) (as amended) shall apply.

Research and development activities of the Innovation Lab co-financed under Article 27 GBER¹⁶ are not eligible for funding under this funding instrument.

The following applies:

- It must be ensured that use of the funded Innovation Lab does not constitute indirect aid (i.e. use by companies or commercial organisations within public administration must be based on market prices), or if so, such indirect aid meets the requirements and conditions of the applicable de minimis Regulation.

4.11 Obligatory consultation

An obligatory consultation with the FFG's call management team must be held prior to submission of the application. This consultation is designed to discuss the project with the FFG's call management team. Applicants have the opportunity to send questions to the FFG in advance.

The obligatory consultation for this call must be held by 08/03/2024 at the latest, the date must be arranged by 01/03/2024 at the latest.

¹⁶ Commission Regulation (EU) No. 651/2014, last amended by Commission Regulation (EU) 2023/1315 of 23 June 2023

Please contact the FFG’s call management team to arrange a date for the consultation (see contact addresses in section **Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden.**).

4.12 What criteria are used to assess funding applications?

Funding applications are assessed according to four criteria:

- 1 Quality of the project**
- 2 Suitability of the project participants**
- 3 Benefit and exploitation**
- 4 Relevance to the call**

The table shows the relevant sub-criteria. In the course of the assessment, points will be assigned to each sub-criterion. Projects that do not reach the specified threshold value for a certain criterion will be rejected. Zero points in one of the sub-criteria of main criterion 4, 'Relevance to the call', will also lead to rejection.

Assessment criteria

Table 1: Funding criteria – Quality of the project

1. Quality of the project	max. points 30 (threshold = 18)
<p>1.1 How ambitious is the proposed Innovation Lab?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ambitiousness and innovativeness of the key areas and planned services of the Innovation Lab – Ambitiousness of the planned innovation projects to be carried out in the Innovation Lab as compared to the state of the art – Sufficient thematic and structural description of the innovation fields (degree of novelty, potential innovation leap, etc.) – Openness and degree of networking in relation to new innovation projects – Involvement of users (range, representation, co-creation, or similar) 	10
<p>1.2 What is the quality of the operating concept?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Consideration of all relevant aspects in the planning of the Innovation Lab – Plausible and reasonable infrastructure, personnel and resource plan for establishment/expansion and operation of the Innovation Lab – Plausibility and transparency of planning, demand and capacity use of the Innovation Lab – Reasonable ratio between costs and planned services – Quality of planning for the management of the Innovation Lab 	10

1. Quality of the project	max. points 30 (threshold = 18)
<p>1.3 If individuals or groups are the subject of the Innovation Lab or if people are affected by the innovation results: To what extent have gender-specific topics been taken into account in the planning process?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Quality of analysis of gender-specific topics – Consideration in the methodological approach of the project <p>(more information can be found here)</p> <p>Projects in which content and focus have no gender relevance according to this analysis will score full points in this sub-criterion.</p>	5
<p>1.4 To what extent does the project take into account sustainability goals (ecological, social, economic), in particular in terms of climate neutrality?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How is sustainability, in particular climate neutrality, taken into account in the planning and implementation of the project and is the methodological approach chosen adequate? <p>(more information can be found here)</p>	5

Table 2: Funding criteria – Suitability of funding applicant/project participants

2. Suitability of project participants	max. points 30 (threshold = 18)
<p>2.1 Does the operating organisation/consortium have the qualifications and resources required to ensure successful implementation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Technical expertise and thematic qualification including those for achieving the sustainability goals – Appropriate structural prerequisites (networking with target groups, users, cooperation partners) – Management and coordination skills 	23
<p>2.2 Was gender balance taken into account in the composition of the management team and consortium?</p>	7

Table 3: Funding criteria – Benefit and exploitation

3. Benefit and exploitation	max. points 20 (threshold = 12)
<p>3.1 Does the planned Innovation Lab bring exploitation opportunities and additional positive effects for Austria as an innovation location?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Benefits for the innovation system in the relevant topics – Benefit and exploitation for the users addressed by the Innovation Lab – Perspective in terms of longer-term exploitation and cooperation opportunities – What are the impacts and effects (positive and negative) of the project in terms of sustainability (social, ecological, economic), in particular in terms of climate neutrality? 	10
<p>3.2. Does the Innovation Lab create added value and benefits for the potential innovation projects?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Transferability of potential results at national/international level 	10

Table 4: Funding criteria – Relevance to the call

4. Relevance to the call	max. points 20 (threshold = 12)
<p>4.1 To what extent does the project meet the objectives and key topics of the call?</p>	10
<p>4.2 Is there demand for the proposed Innovation Lab? (Demand analysis depending on the size and orientation of the Innovation Lab and taking into account the existing facilities in Europe and Austria)</p>	5
<p>4.3. To what extent will the funding influence the project positively in one or more of the following dimensions?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Implementation, acceleration, scope or range in terms of the following aspects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Radical innovation approaches – Longer-term strategic orientation – Mobilisation and realisation of innovation potential 	5

5 SUBMISSION PROCEDURE

5.1 What is the procedure for submission?

Applications must be submitted online via [eCall](#) before the deadline.

How does it work?

- Enter the project description via eCall.
- The system will verify whether the costs entered meet the funding conditions (e.g. funding amount, maximum project size)
- Upload the required documents
- Finalise the application in eCall and click "Submit application"
- Upon successful submission, an acknowledgement will be sent automatically by email.

Not necessary:

- Additional postal submission of duly executed copy

Not possible:

- Resubmission or modification of individual parts of the application form
- Revision of the funding application after submission

The application documents are to be submitted by the operating organisation/consortium leader or by a duly authorised representative. The FFG may request evidence that this person is authorised to represent the applicant. If you are unable to provide such evidence the FFG reserves the right to reject the application for formal reasons.

Detailed information can be found in the [eCall Tutorial](#).

5.2 How will confidential project data be used?

The FFG processes the personal data of funding applicants and funding recipients provided by the data subjects as part of the application for funding, data collected by the FFG for the purpose of concluding the funding contract, and data generated by searches in the transparency portal according to Sec. 32 (5) of the Transparency Database Act (TDBG 2012) for the following purposes:

- Processing of the funding application and assessment of whether the general and specific funding requirements have been met;
- Conclusion of the funding contract and (if a funding contract has been concluded) compliance with the relevant contractual obligations, including but not limited to administration of the funding payments and monitoring of compliance with funding requirements;

- Compliance with statutory obligations, including but not limited to reporting obligations and control purposes in order to avoid double funding (i.e. Sec. 38 in conjunction with 18, 27 ARR, as well as Sec. 12 FTFG and Sec. 9 FFG-G).

The legal basis of processing is therefore Art. 6 (1) (b) GDPR, i.e. performance of a contract, and Art 6 (1) (c) GDPR, i.e. compliance with legal obligations.

The personal data will be disclosed to the following institutions in compliance with legal obligations:

- The FFG's owner ministries, other contracting authorities for the management of funding measures (e.g. other federal ministries, regional governments, KLIEN)
- Third parties, which may include the Court of Audit, EU bodies, the Chips Joint Undertaking and other federal or regional funding agencies.

National and international experts will be given access to the submitted documents for the purpose of project evaluation, see section 8. Such experts act as data processors in the name and on behalf of the FFG and are required to take technical and organisational measures to ensure data security and data confidentiality. Project content and results may only be published (e.g. on the website or in social media forums) with the consent of the funding recipient (Art 6 (1) (a) GDPR) unless the FFG has a legal obligation to publish such information.

The FFG must also obtain the consent of the data subject for any other data use exceeding these provisions.

The FFG is under a legal obligation to maintain secrecy about company and project information pursuant to Sec. 9 (4) of the Austrian Research Promotion Agency Act (FFG-G, Federal Law Gazette BGBl. I No. 73/2004).

The FFG will ensure a level of security appropriate to the risk in terms of confidentiality, integrity, availability and resilience of the systems by implementing technical and organisational measures within the meaning of Art. 32 GDPR that are sufficient and appropriate for protecting the data against accidental or unlawful destruction, loss and unauthorised access.

Further information about ensuring the confidentiality and security of personal data during the course of the project is available in the [eCall Tutorial](#).

6 EVALUATION AND DECISION

6.1 What is the formal check?

In the formal check the application is examined for formal correctness 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.**

The FFG will communicate the result of the formal check **within 4 weeks** via an [eCall](#) message:

- If the formal criteria are not met and the deficiencies cannot be corrected, the application for funding will not enter the subsequent steps of the procedure.
- If the deficiencies can be corrected, the funding applicant may rectify these problems within a reasonable period of time.

Should it transpire after the formal check that incorrect information has been given, the funding application may also be removed from consideration at a subsequent point in the procedure.

Recommendations and requirements can be defined during the formal check. Recommendations are non-binding comments and opinions, which are designed to support the funding applicant in implementing the project. Requirements are binding – see section **Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden..**

Table 5: Checklist for the formal check of funding applications

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Items checked</i>	<i>Can deficiency be corrected?</i>	<i>Consequence</i>
Operating organisation /consortium members are eligible to participate	<i>The operating organisation /consortium members must exist as legal entities in Austria (see sections Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden. and Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden.)</i>	No	Rejection for formal reasons

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Items checked</i>	<i>Can deficiency be corrected?</i>	<i>Consequence</i>
Use of correct language	<i>The application is written in English.</i>	<i>No</i>	Rejection for formal reasons
Role allocation for operating organisation/individual consortium members	<i>Examination of the application</i>	<i>No</i>	Rejection for formal reasons
For consortia: A consortium partner assumes the role of owner and ownership is based on an existing legal act	<i>Legal act</i>	<i>No</i>	Rejection for formal reasons

6.2 How is the evaluation procedure organised?

The documents submitted will be reviewed by national and international experts based on the criteria given in section **Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden..**

The initial assessment according to the defined evaluation criteria based on the written reviews is followed by a hearing organised by the funding agency. The hearing is not intended to supplement or replace the documents submitted, but enables the members of the evaluation committee to put questions to the applicants.

The evaluation committee will make a funding recommendation taking into account the results of the hearing and the written reviews.

It is possible to exclude reviewers (individuals or staff of particular organisations) stating the reasons. eCall includes an entry field for this purpose.

FFG experts examine the financial potential of the project participants, including credit rating and liquidity. Where necessary, they may request additional documents without which the examination cannot be completed. Undertakings in difficulty are not eligible for funding. The decision as to whether an undertaking is considered to be 'in difficulty' is made based on the definition contained in the [General Block Exemption Regulation](#) (OJ L 187/2014 as amended, Art. 2(18)), which provides the European legal basis of the present funding scheme.

6.3 Who makes the funding decision?

The FFG Management will make the funding decision based on the funding recommendation provided by the evaluation committee.

7 FUNDING PROCEDURE

7.1 How is the funding contract concluded?

In the event of a positive decision, the FFG will communicate to the funding recipients a data view showing the key parameters of the funding contract (e.g. amount of funding granted, amount of eligible costs, start and end date of the funding period, reporting obligations and binding requirements). This information will be made available via the eCall system for a specified period of time.

If the data view is accepted within the specified period, the FFG will draw up the funding contract and send it to the funding recipients.

Once the duly signed **funding contract** has been returned **within the specified period**, the funding contract shall become legally valid. There shall be no entitlement to funding until the signed contract has been returned.

7.2 How are requirements taken into account?

Requirements may be imposed in the course of the formal check and cost audit. Two types of additional requirements are possible:

- Requirements that must be met prior to the conclusion of the funding contract.
- Requirements that must be met by the funding recipients in the course of the project.

Requirements shall form an integral part of the contract.

7.3 What reports and accounts are required?

- Within 1 month of the reporting deadlines specified in the funding contract, an interim report and interim accounts must be submitted via the eCall reporting function.
- Within 3 months of the conclusion of the project, a final report, a (publishable) summary and the final accounts must be presented, again via the eCall reporting function. The publication of a summary may be omitted in case of incompatibility with commercial exploitation or if the relevant information is subject to confidentiality obligations for security reasons or data protection regulations.
- An annual monitoring report must be submitted for Innovation Labs used and managed on a non-commercial basis starting with the commencement of use. This report must include a presentation of the non-commercial or commercial use (if applicable) and compliance with the access rules for companies with preferential access and third parties. The FFG must be informed about the commencement of use. The reporting templates provided by the FFG must be used for this purpose.

The reports and accounts must meet the following requirements:

- They must contain the description of activities and also the cost statements of the operating organisation/consortium.
- Reports must be prepared using the eCall templates (including annexes, if any).

Support of public relations: The funding recipients agree to work together with the FFG and the responsible ministries to support PR work, if required. This includes in particular the provision of non-confidential project information and images for electronic dissemination portals and other media purposes.

7.4 How are the funding instalments paid?

The national funding will be paid in accordance with the funding contract. It is planned that the payment interval will be adapted to the EC's instalment scheme. The instalments will be paid to a bank account of the operating organisation/consortium leader.

Further instalments will be paid in accordance with project progress:

- after the interim reports and interim accounts have been audited;
- (where necessary) after the specified requirements have been met.

Instalment amounts may be reduced if the interim reports indicate a delay in project progress or if the costs are below plan. Payment of any funding during the course of the project does not imply recognition of costs.

The first instalment paid upon contract conclusion and after the specified requirements have been met amounts to 25% of the funding and is limited to a maximum of EUR 1 million.

Further instalments will be paid on the basis of annual interim reports and are limited to EUR 1 million per year. An amount of 25% of the contractual funding is reserved for the final instalment.

7.5 How is the on-site audit carried out?

In addition to the reports, the FFG may carry out an on-site audit during or after the end of the project.

The original receipts and associated documentation of payments (e.g. account statement) must be made available for these on-site audits. The FFG's audits will be announced in good time.

7.6 Review of the Innovation Lab

A review of the AT-C³ may be carried out during the funding period and may also involve external experts. The reviewers may recommend to the FFG whether the AT-C³ should be continued or terminated before the end of the funding period (stop/go decision by the FFG).

The review should be carried out in accordance with the provisions of the European Grant Agreement.

7.7 How should changes be communicated?

Any changes to contractual points such as project content, project participants, costs, deadlines or funding period must be substantiated and, where necessary, submitted for approval:

- via [eCall](#) message
- in the interim or final report

All relevant documents should be uploaded as an attachment to the eCall message. Any modifications to the contract parameters require the approval of the FFG.

Immediate notification is required for:

- substantial changes in the project
- changes concerning project participants, such as withdrawals, new ownership structure or insolvency proceedings

The following changes should be communicated in the interim or final report:

- cost reallocations within cost categories, e.g. material costs to personnel costs

7.8 Can the funding period be extended?

If the approved level of costs has not been exceeded, the funding period may be extended for up to one year on a cost-neutral basis.

The following requirements must be met:

- The funding recipient is not responsible for the delay.
- The project is still eligible for funding.
- An application for extension has been submitted via [eCall](#) message within the approved project period.
- The term of the European Grant Agreement is extended for the same period.

7.9 What happens after the conclusion of the project?

Following the conclusion of the project, the operating organisation/consortium leader submits a final report, final accounts and a monitoring report. The FFG will check whether the funding has been used appropriately, taking into account any audit results communicated by the EC (including final cost recognition). The audit will establish the final eligible costs.

You will receive the result of the audit via eCall message:

- In the event of a **positive** result, the appropriate use of the funding will be confirmed and the final instalment will be transferred.
- In the event of a **negative** result, procedures may be initiated to secure repayment of funding.

Funding details: The specified final instalment will be transferred once the originally planned costs have been reached. If the project is underspent the level of funding will be reduced accordingly. The funding amount may also be reduced for content-related, formal or legal reasons.

For more information about eligible costs, see the [Cost Guidelines](#).

8 CALL DOCUMENTS

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Applications must be submitted electronically via the FFG eCall system before the deadline (<https://ecall.ffg.at>).

Call documents www.ffg.at	Funding
General cost regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Cost Guideline (English) (Cost eligibility in FFG projects, version 3.1)

9 LEGAL BASIS

The call is based on the Guideline of the Austrian Research Promotion Agency for the Funding of Research, Technology, Development and Innovation aimed at active, open-topic RTI funding ([FFG-RL Offensiv¹⁷](#)).

The company size shall be established in accordance with the corresponding SME definition specified in EU competition law. More detailed information can be found on our website under [SME Definition](#).

All EU provisions shall be applicable as amended.

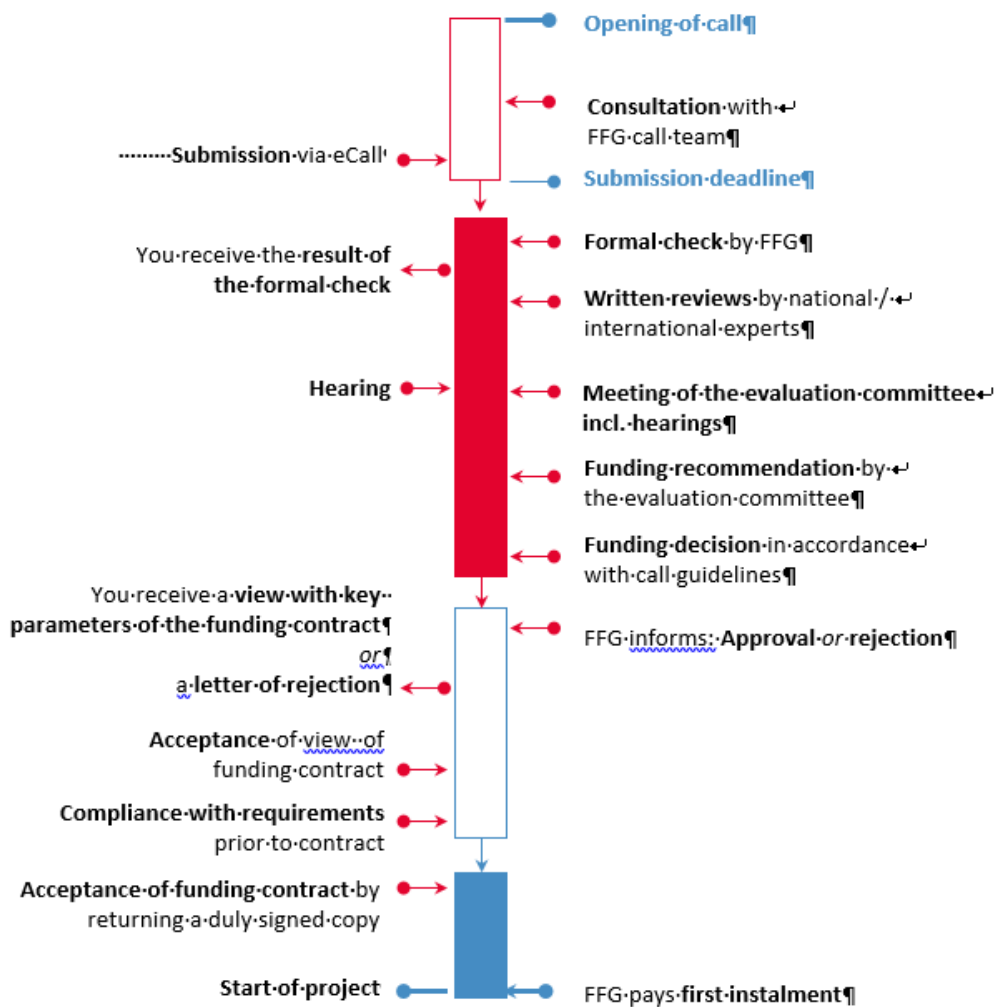
Research and development services shall be subject to the exemption provision of Sec 10 (13) of the Public Procurement Act, Federal Law Gazette BGBl. I No. 17/2006 as amended by BGBl. I No. 15/2010 (hereinafter BVergG 2006).

¹⁷ "Richtlinie für die Österreichische Forschungsförderungsgesellschaft mbH zur Förderung von Forschung, Technologie, Entwicklung und Innovation für eine offensive und transformative FTI-Förderung (FFG-Offensiv-Richtlinie 2024-2026)" of the Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology and the Federal Ministry for Labour and Economy (GZ BMK 2024-0.045.202) (GZ BMAW 2024-0.074.288)

10 ANNEX

10.1 Call milestones (national part)

The illustration below shows the process and milestones of the call. More information about the entry into force of the funding contract can be found in section 3.



10.2 Award criteria for Calls under the Digital Europe Programme

The award criteria used in the calls under DEP work programme 2021-22 were as follows:

10.2.1 Criterion 1 - Relevance

- Alignment with the objectives and activities as described in the Call document;
- Contribution to long-term policy objectives, relevant policies and strategies, and synergies with activities at European and national level;
- Extent to which the project would reinforce and secure the digital technology supply chain in the EU; *
- Extent to which the project can overcome financial obstacles such as the lack of market finance. *

10.2.2 Criterion 2 - Implementation

- Maturity of the project;
- Soundness of the implementation plan and efficient use of resources;
- Capacity of the applicants, and when applicable the consortium as a whole, to carry out the proposed work.

10.2.3 Criterion 3 - Impact

- Extent to which the project will achieve the expected outcomes and deliverables referred to in the call for proposals and, where relevant, the plans to disseminate and communicate project achievements;
- Extent to which the project will strengthen competitiveness and bring important benefits for society;
- Extent to which the project addresses environmental sustainability and the European Green Deal goals, in terms of direct effects and/or in awareness of environmental effects. *

* May not be applicable to all topics.