# Guidelines for Applicants

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## 1. MANTRA in a nutshell

MANTRA (Sustainable and Innovative Manufacturing by Ensuring Digital, Green, and Social SME Transformation) is a three-and-a-half-year Horizon Europe project funded under the call topic HORIZON-CL4-2024-RESILIENCE-01-41 ('Innovate to Transform' Support for SMEs' Sustainability Transition). The project, which began on 1 November 2024 and will run until 30 April 2028, brings together a consortium of 8 partners from 7 countries with a total budget of €5 million. Approximately €2.5 million is allocated to a cascade funding mechanism that supports EU manufacturing SMEs.

In line with the EU's 2030 vision for manufacturing which emphasizes competitiveness, sustainability, resilient ecosystems, and the ability to meet rising environmental and social demands, MANTRA is set to guide the transformation journeys of 50 manufacturing SMEs.

MANTRA aims to drive the green and digital transformation of European manufacturing SMEs through the adoption of advanced technologies and social innovation.

The manufacturing industry, led by SMEs, drives Europe's economy but is also the highest-emitting sector. Achieving sustainability goals requires SME engagement. The COVID-19 crisis accelerated digital adoption, enabling efficiency and circular economy practices. Geopolitical and energy challenges further highlight the urgency of this transition.

MANTRA will support a group of 50 manufacturing SMEs with a financial support of a €50,000, with a dedicated process in which they learn and unlock their digital and technological potential within a sustainable business model that ensures more resource-efficient, and circular processes and infrastructures.

## 2. What Does MANTRA aim to achieve?

The MANTRA project aims to accelerate the green and digital transition of European manufacturing SMEs by promoting advanced technologies and social innovation. It will establish a scalable, EU-wide capacity-building and demonstration program, offering SMEs tailored support, expert networks, and financial assistance to develop sustainable business models.

The project prioritizes traditional manufacturing SMEs with low adoption levels of advanced technologies to enhance their competitiveness and resilience. MANTRA covers all manufacturing sectors, focusing on six key subsectors based on factors like size, turnover, and environmental impact.

*Figure 1. Manufacturing subsectors supported by MANTRA*

Support will be provided for the adoption of 16 EU-priority advanced technologies (including advanced materials, advanced manufacturing, artificial intelligence, augmented and virtual reality, big data, cloud technologies, connectivity, industrial biotechnology, Internet of Things, micro and nanoelectronics, mobility, photonics, robotics, and security), with an emphasis on those most relevant to each SME's competitiveness and sustainability. Only applications demonstrating a clear impact pathway will be eligible for support.

MANTRA's key objectives include:

1. A digital support centre for SME collaboration and transformation.
2. A due diligence toolbox to assess SMEs' readiness for green and digital transition.
3. Scalable capacity-building programs to provide tailored advisory services.
4. A technology marketplace to connect traditional and tech-savvy SMEs.
5. Financial support (grants of €50,000) for SMEs to implement transformation plans.
6. A community for SME collaboration, peer-learning, and best practice exchange.
7. A go-to-market strategy ensuring long-term impact and replication of results.
8. EU-level awareness and cooperation through large-scale dissemination efforts.

## 3. How can MANTRA empower Manufacturing SMEs for a Sustainable Future?

MANTRA empowers manufacturing SMEs by providing targeted, practical support that enables them to adopt advanced technologies and integrate sustainability into their core operations. Through a comprehensive and scalable approach, MANTRA addresses the specific challenges faced by traditional SMEs - such as limited resources, low technology uptake, and fragmented support - by combining, expert guidance, peer-learning opportunities and financial assistance.

Keyways MANTRA empowers SMEs include:

- **Tailored capacity building:** SMEs receive personalised advice and training through a structured process that builds their digital and green competencies.

- **Access to expertise:** SMEs are matched with tech-savvy partners through a dedicated marketplace and co-creation processes, enabling them to identify and implement solutions best suited to their needs.

- **Systematic readiness assessment:** a due diligence toolbox helps SMEs understand their current digital and sustainability status and define clear, impactful transformation pathways.

- **Inclusive and scalable support:** by prioritising low-tech and women-led SMEs across all manufacturing sectors, MANTRA ensures equitable access and a broad impact, contributing to a more resilient and sustainable European industry.

- **Long-term integration:** MANTRA not only supports short-term adoption but fosters a community and strategy for long-term replication, encouraging SMEs to continuously innovate and remain competitive in a rapidly evolving market.

- **Financial empowerment:** financial support up to €50,000 help SMEs implement transformation plans.

## 4. Who is MANTRA Consortium?

MANTRA consortium is composed of 8 partners from 7 EU countries with proven and wide experience in technical, business and innovation support to SMEs, possessing all the tools and methodologies needed to help EU SMEs in their transition to become green and digital.

www.zabala.es

www.rina.org

www.inesctec.pt

www.babele.co

secpho

www.secpho.org

www.eitmanufacturing.eu

Greenovate! EUROPE

CETIM

https://greenovate-europe.eu

www.cetim-engineering.com

## 5. MANTRA's journey

To achieve its objectives, MANTRA operates in close collaboration with key European innovation and sustainability networks, ensuring seamless support for SMEs in their green and digital transformation. By building on existing initiatives, MANTRA takes a step further by offering tailored training, technical assistance, networking opportunities, and direct financial support to help SMEs implement their transformation strategies.

The following figure summarises the main steps of **MANTRA's journey** to receive the technical assistance and financial support.
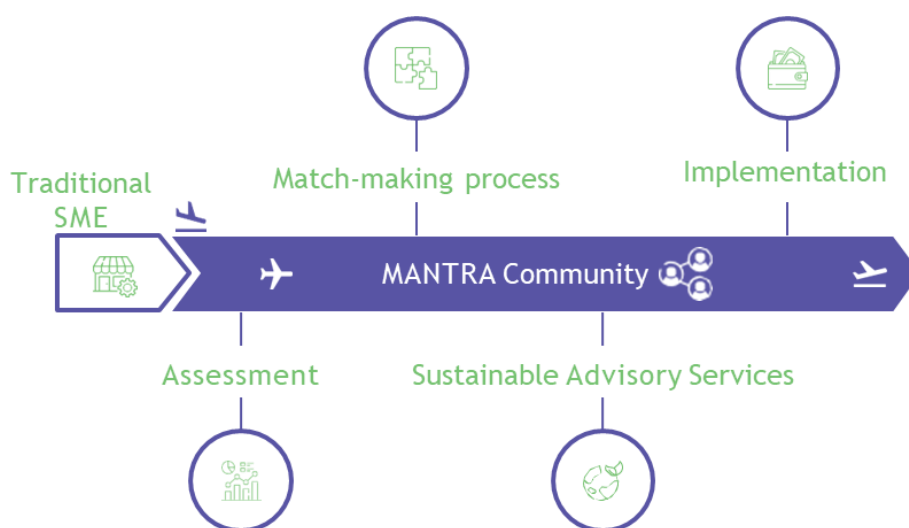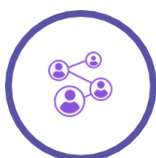


*Figure 2.MANTRA's journey.*

**MANTRA Community**

Training and coaching programmes and materials, P2P learning, webinars, workshops, etc.

**Assessment**

Replicable self-assessment plan for green and digital transformation readiness.

**Match-making process**

Co-creation labs to foster cooperation between tech-savvy SMEs and traditional SMEs.

**Sustainable Advisory Services**

Services are provided to SMEs to support the uptake and implementation of advanced technologies and social innovation.

**Implementation**

Financial support of up to EUR 50,000 is available to implement the recommended transformation, with access to a catalogue of services offered by DIHs, ENNs, ATIs, ECCPs, OITBs, and others.

## 6. Description of the Open Call

**1st Open Call Timeline**

| Launch of the 1st Open Call | 16th of June 2025 |
|---|---|
| Deadline of the 1st Open Call | 15th of September 2025 |
| Selection process | October-November 2025 |
| Notification of successful applicants | November 2025 |
| Formalisation of Sub-Grant Agreement | December 2025 |
| Expected launch date of sub-projects | January 2026 |

**Objective of the Open Call**

The objective of this call is to select the manufacturing SMEs that will receive support to define and implement their MANTRA Journey plan, with the aim of becoming more sustainable and innovative. Through this initiative, selected SMEs will enhance their capacity to adopt advanced technologies and

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social innovation for sustainability, by collaboration with tech-savvy SMEs and accessing services provided by EU specialised business support networks and organizations (MANTRA financial support).

**Scope of the call:**

Proposals should focus on a **proposed transformation project** that is realistic, impactful, and embedded in the SME's strategy for long-term sustainability and growth through the uptake of advanced technologies. Applicants' concept must contribute to the green and digital transformation of the SME ensuring reducing environmental impacts while enhancing the competitiveness and resilience of the business. Projects should align with circular economy principles and take into account inclusive, socially responsible practices.

**Open Call steps:**

The following steps outline the process through which manufacturing SMEs can apply for and participate in the MANTRA open call:
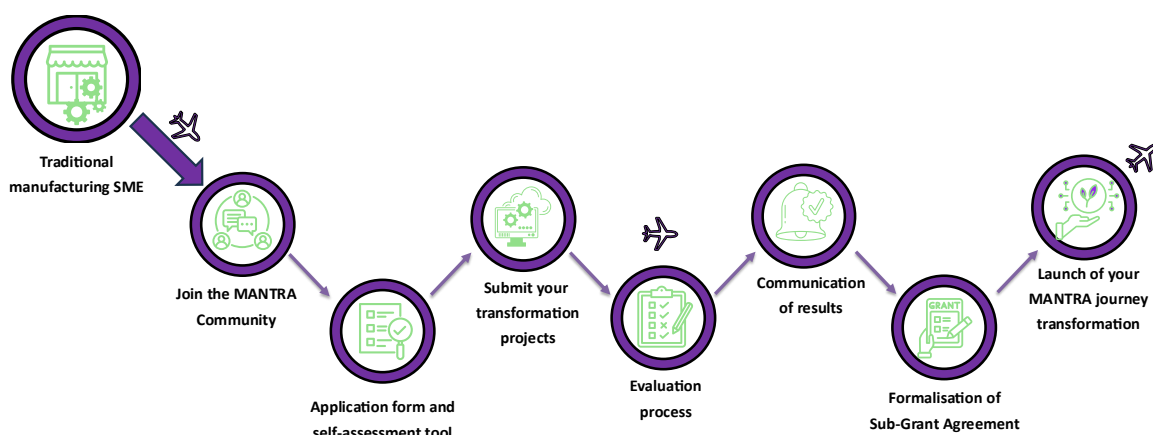
*Figure 3. MANTRA 1ˢᵗ Open Call summary*

- **Step 1- Join the MANTRA Community**: register to become a member, access exclusive resources, explore content shared by peers, and participate in the Open Call (this step is mandatory). Registration is available via the MANTRA platform at the following: Community Platform and Open Calls - mantra-project.eu
- **Step 2 – Prepare your application:** complete both the application form, available on the platform, and the self-assessment tool.

**Application form** collects information about your company, such as its profile, contact details, proposed transformation project, support and services required from MANTRA to launch your journey transformation: Manufacturing SMEs - mantra-project.eu.

**Self-assessment tool** is a questionnaire-based tool designed to help companies evaluate their green and digital readiness, including aspects such as sustainability practices, innovation maturity, and transformation roadmaps. The tool is accessible via the MANTRA website: mantra-project.eu and the direct link: https://mantra.cetim.fr. Upload your self-assessment pdf into your application.

- **Step 3- Submission of your transformation project**: submit your full proposal in English, along with the signed Declaration of Honour and any supporting document, via the MANTRA platform.
- **Step 4-Evaluation process: the evaluation process consists of two steps** based on relevance, impact, innovation, and feasibility.
  - 1- Evaluation and first screening of the projects by the MANTRA partners
  - 2- Evaluation by 3 independent and external evaluators.
- **Step 5- Notification of successful applicants:** applicants will be notified via email and the MANTRA platform. Successful applicants will receive a Notification Letter and an Evaluation Summary Report (ESR) with feedback on their proposal.

  Proposals may fall into one of the following categories:

  - **Accepted:** invited to prepare the sub-grant agreement
  - **Reserve list:** may be invited later if places become available
  - **Rejected:** not selected
- **Step 6- Formalization of Sub-Grant Agreement:** selected applicants will be invited to prepare and sign a Sub-Grant Agreement with the MANTRA consortium.
- **Step 7- Launch of green, digital and social journey transformation:** once the agreement is signed, SMEs will officially start their transformation journey with support from MANTRA. Beneficiaries will gain access to tailored services, expert guidance, and collaborative opportunities to implement their green, digital, and social innovation projects

All proposals must be submitted exclusively through the MANTRA platform, as it is the only officially recognized channel for applications. It's important to note that late submissions will not be accepted under any circumstances, so applicants are strongly advised to complete their submissions before the deadline. Once an application is submitted, no changes or resubmissions will be allowed.

Each project selected through this process will run for a duration of six months. This first call for proposals has a maximum budget allocation of €1,250,000 dedicated to supporting up to 25 SME as they carry out their MANTRA Journey.

## 7. Eligibility criteria

The following eligibility criteria, related to the applicants, funding, and proposals apply.

### 7.1. Applicant's eligibility

To qualify for MANTRA's technical and financial assistance, SMEs must meet the following eligibility requirements

- **Legal Entity**

Applicants must be registered SMEs according to the European Commission definition (Commission Recommendation 2003/361/EC) or local regulations if more restrictive in terms of employee count and turnover.

- **Financial Support**

The maximum financial support amount per beneficiary is €50,000 (lump-sum). Each SME can receive funding only once. While multiple proposals may be submitted, only one per SME will be selected. Unsuccessful applicants may resubmit in the second call if they were not accepted in the first one.

- **Geographical Scope**

Applicants must operate within an EU Member State. SMEs from Horizon Europe Associated Countries are not eligible.

- **Language requirement**

English is the official language of the MANTRA Open Calls. Applications must be submitted in English, and participating SME representatives must be able to communicate in English.

- **Eligible sectors**

Only SMEs within the following NACE C Codes (Manufacturing Subsectors) are eligible:

*Table 11: Manufacturing Subsectors eligible for MANTRA*

| Machinery |
| --- |
| C28 - Manufacture of machinery and equipment n.e.c. |
| C27 - Manufacture of electrical equipment |
| C26 - Manufacture of computer, electronic and optical products |
| **Food** |
| C10 - Manufacture of food products |

| | |
|---|---|
| C11 - Manufacture of beverages | |
| **Metals** | |
| C25 - Manufacture of fabricated metal products, except machinery and equipment | |
| C24 - Manufacture of basic metals | |
| **Plastics** | |
| C22 - Manufacture of rubber and plastic products | |
| **Ceramics** | |
| C23 Manufacture of other non-metallic mineral products | |
| **Textiles** | |
| C13 Manufacture of textiles | |
| C14 Manufacture of wearing apparel | |
| C15 Manufacture of leather and related products of other materials | |

- **Self-assessment requirement**

Applicants must complete and upload the MANTRA Self-Assessment report, which evaluates their green and digital transition readiness (https://mantra.cetim.fr.)

- **Legitimacy and honourability**

Applicants must submit a Declaration of Honour, confirming they are not subject to exclusion criteria under Articles 136 and 141 of the EU Financial Regulation.

- **Absence of conflict of interest**

Applicants must declare that they do not have any actual or potential conflicts of interest in the MANTRA selection process or project duration. If a conflict exists, it must be disclosed for potential mitigation.

- **Submission process**

Applications must be submitted exclusively through the MANTRA platform within the call's duration. Only the uploaded documents will be considered, and all information must be accurate, complete, and verifiable.

Failure to meet any of these criteria will result in ineligibility for the MANTRA Open Call.

## 7.2.    Eligible projects

To qualify for MANTRA support, SME projects must align with the following criteria:

**1. Business Transformation**

Projects must demonstrate a credible and evidence-based transformation pathway, contributing to one or more of the following areas:

**Raw Materials:** use of recycled materials, substitution of critical raw materials, or second-life solutions.

**Safe & Sustainable by Design:** development of materials and products that are non-toxic, environmentally friendly, and enhance circular value chains.

**Circular Economy:** Strengthening cross-sector cooperation to create resilient and circular supply chains.

**Clean Energy & Efficiency:** adoption of technologies that optimize energy use, integrate renewables, and reduce carbon emissions.

**Supply Chain Resilience:** strategies to improve flexibility and adaptability in supply chains to withstand disruptions.

## 2. Digital Transition

Projects must integrate at least one of the 16 advanced technologies defined by the Advanced Technologies for Industry (ATI) project, including: AI, IoT, robotics, blockchain, big data, nanotechnology, and others.

## 3. Environmental Impact

Eligible projects must contribute to at least one of the following sustainability goals:

- Reduction in waste generation and raw material consumption
- GHG emissions reduction and energy savings
- Increased recycling rates and improved quality of recovered materials
- Reduction of hazardous chemical use
- Other environmental benefits proposed by the applicant

## 4. Socio-Economic Impact

Projects must also generate tangible economic and social benefits, such as:

- Investment in business transformation and new technologies
- Growth in turnover/sales
- Job creation (FTE)
- Upskilling & reskilling through training and peer-learning activities

Only applications that clearly demonstrate measurable impact in these areas will be eligible for MANTRA support.

# 8. Selection Criteria

To be considered for MANTRA support, your proposal must follow a clear structure and provide specific information. This section helps you understand what your proposal should include and how it will be evaluated

## 8.1. Structure of the proposal

The proposal must be submitted in English through the MANTRA Digital Platform and should include the following sections:

1. **SME Description**: basic information regarding the entity applying to the open call.

2. **Proposed transformation project**: general description of the project.

3. **Main approach of the project**: description of the environmental, digital, business and social approaches of the project.

4. **Attachments**: any additional documents required.

### 8.1.1. Proposal at a Glance

This first part of your proposal is a **brief overview**. It should include:

- A short description of your SME and its location.
- A summary of your proposed business transformation project, including*:*

  - Main goals
  - Expected impacts
  - Planned actions
  - Roles of involved partners

- The type of advanced technology you will use.
- The estimated size of your project (budget in €).
- Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) you aim to achieve*.*

### 8.1.2. Project description, impacts and MANTRA support requested

This is the **main part** of your proposal. Please include the following:

1. **SME Description**

   - Identify your manufacturing subsector using the NACE Code (C).

2. **Project Description**

   - Explain your project idea.

- Highlight its degree of innovation (e.g., Technology Readiness Level).
- Specify which advanced technology (from the ATI list) you'll use.
- Show how your project will contribute to the environmental and socio-economic impacts listed below.

3. **Requested MANTRA Support**

- Describe what type of support you need from MANTRA (e.g., services, expertise).
- Refer to the list available on the MANTRA Platform.

4. **Investment Size**

- Provide a justification of the estimated investment. If multiple actions are included, break them down individually.

5. **Readiness Level**

- Share any preparation you've already done (e.g., plans, studies, permits).

6. **Main Approach of the Project**
Clearly explain your strategy, based on the following four aspects:

- **Digital approach**: Use of cutting-edge or emerging tech.
- **Business approach**: Impact on revenue, jobs, market, etc.
- **Environmental approach**: Positive environmental results.
- **Social approach**: Alignment with Sustainable Development Goals and expected social benefits.

7. **Expected Impacts**

Describe the **expected results** of your transformation using **KPIs.** You must include **at least one environmental** and **one socio-economic impact** from the tables below:

*Table 22. Expected environmental impacts (the project must contribute to at least one).*

| What are the minimum environmental impacts for each transformation journey? | |
|---|---|
| ≥ 30% | Reduction of waste generated |
| ≥ 20% | Reduction of primary raw materials consumption |
| ≥ 25% | GHG emissions reduction |
| ≥ 30% | Primary Energy Savings |
| ≥ 20% | Increase recycling rates (improving quantity and quality of recovered raw materials) |
| ≥ 25% | Reduction in use of chemicals likely to be (eco) toxic, bio-accumulative or mobile |
| ≥ 25% | Other environmental benefits defined by the applicant |

*Table 3.3 Expected socio-economic impacts (the project must contribute to at least one).*

| What are the minimum socio-economic impacts for each transformation journey after 3-5 years? | |
|---|---|
| ≥ 0.5 M€ | Foreseen investment to adopt business transformation, including adoption of advanced technology |
| ≥ 10-15% | Turnover or sales |
| ≥ 2-4 | New jobs (FTE) |
| ≥ 2-4 | Foreseen number of training courses or peer-learning activities for upskilling and/or reskilling |

8. **Expected economic savings and pay-back time** (if applicable)

- Estimate the cost savings your project may achieve.
- Provide justified pay-back time for the investment.

### 8.1.3. MANTRA available advisory services for SMEs

As part of your project proposal, you may request specific advisory services and expertise offered through the MANTRA consortium. These services are designed to help SMEs accelerate their green and digital transformation. Below is a simplified overview of the main categories of support you can access.

- *Consultancy and Advisory Services*

**- Tech adoption**

Support for SMEs to implement Socio-technical solutions (e.g. AI, IoT, and robotics for process optimization, energy efficiency, and emissions reduction). Includes services for testing and implementing digital solutions for energy efficiency, emissions tracking, and process optimization before full deployment.

**- Proof of concept**

Assistance in defining technical and market feasibility, interpreting results to guide go/no-go decisions.

**- Technology transfer**

Identify suitable technologies, facilitate licensing agreements, mediate between research institutions and companies, and manage the integration of new technology into existing operations.

**- Design management**

Support SMEs in structuring and guiding their design processes strategically. This includes aligning design with business goals, integrating sustainability or circular economy principles, in coordination of design activities across teams (with external consultants), align product design with business strategy, optimize user experience.

**- Designing pilot process and prototyping**

Design and set up pilot lines or experimental setups, run feasibility tests, interpret technical results, and recommend adjustments for scaling. Connect SMEs to testbeds or fabrication services.

**- Investment readiness**

Assist with business planning, financial modelling, due diligence prep, and aligning the business model with investor expectations.

**- Circular business model canvas (BMC)**

Mapping of current and future models, identification of circular opportunities, and integration of resource efficiency and reuse into value propositions, supply chains, and revenue streams.

**- New business model**

Analysis of market and competitor data, co-development of revenue strategies, exploration of new value chains, and validation through customer feedback and iterative testing.

**- Social innovation**

Identification of community needs, design of inclusive business models or services, evaluation of social impact, and securing of funding for socially driven innovation.

**- Lean manufacturing**

Evaluation of production processes to identify inefficiencies and waste, followed by proposed tools and staff training to maintain improvements.

**- Market entry and expansion strategy development**

Conduct market research, regulatory analysis, competitor benchmarking, channel strategy, and local partnership identification to support entry or scaling in target markets.

**- Innovation road mapping**

Creation of a strategic roadmap that outlines innovation priorities over time, gathering input from stakeholders, assessing market and technology trends, and define development phases and milestones

**- Intellectual Property Rights**

Support services to help SMEs identify, protect, and manage intellectual property assets such as patents, trademarks, copyrights, and trade secrets. Includes IPR audits, guidance on filing procedures, freedom-to-operate analysis, and advice on IP strategy to maximize competitive advantage and innovation potential. May involve training and connection to legal or patent experts.

**- Life Cycle Assessment (LCA), Social Life Cycle Assessment (s-LCA), or Life Cycle Costing (LCC)**

Conduct assessments using ISO standards, compile data across the value chain, quantify impacts, and deliver actionable insights to improve sustainability performance.

**- GHG emission calculation**

Perform scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions analysis using tools and recognized protocols, develop reduction strategies, and assist with reporting (e.g., ISO 14067 or GHG Protocol)

**- Energy audit and/or energy consumption analysis**

Advice on onsite audits, analyse consumption patterns, recommend efficiency upgrades, and quantify potential savings.

- *Regulatory guidance and compliance support*

**- Adaptation to standards**

Guidance on compliance with technical standards (e.g., ISO 9001, ISO 14001, ISO 50001), conduct gap analyses, develop documentation, and support audits and certification processes (if applicable)

**- Adaptation to environmental rules**

Interpretation of relevant regulations (e.g., REACH, RoHS, EU Taxonomy), conduct compliance checks, advise on reporting obligations, and assist with permitting.

- *Training and capacity building*

**- Skill development and specific training**

Expert-led sessions on energy efficiency, waste reduction, product life cycle assessment, and decarbonization strategies. Industry-specific programs with digital tools for carbon footprint tracking and emissions reduction planning. Some initiatives also provide continuous technical support and mentoring programs to assist companies in implementing best practices in sustainability and digital transformation.

- *Networking and partnership opportunities*

**- Matchmaking with technological or social partners**

Platforms for SMEs, researchers, and industry leaders to collaborate on circular economy initiatives, digital transformation, and sustainable production. Matchmaking events, working groups, and knowledge-sharing forums. Includes innovation hubs and sector-specific events to foster collaboration between companies, research centres, and policymakers.

When preparing your proposal, make sure that you identify the services most relevant to your project and explain how these services will support your business transformation. Refer to the catalogue of services on the MANTRA Digital Platform for more details.

### 8.1.1. MANTRA implementation services for SMEs

Selected SMEs will be awarded a grant of up to €50,000 to support the effective implementation of their transformation journey, with a focus on adopting advanced technologies and driving social innovation within their operations.

This financial support is intended to be used specifically for the procurement of external services that are essential to executing the proposed transformation activities. These services must be sourced from some of the EU specialised business support networks and organisations. Through engagement with existing EU support networks and initiatives, SMEs will gain access to the necessary resources and expertise to fully unlock the benefits of adopting advanced technologies and social innovation in their businesses.

Some specific categories of services that could be procured with the grant include:

- **Specialised consultancy, advisor and/or coaching services**: tailored expert support addressing specific SME needs, such as digital strategy, environmental compliance, innovation management, or change leadership.

- **Prototyping, pilot testing and/or demonstration**: design, test, and showcase new solutions before scaling.

- **Feasibility studies**: evaluation of the practicality, sustainability, and economic impact of proposed digital and green transformation initiatives.

- **Use of testing facilities**: access infrastructure to trial and validate/optimize technologies.

- **Adaptation of business processes**: redesign operations to align with transformation goals. Aiming of increasing efficiency, reducing environmental impact, and enhancing competitiveness

- **Digitalization & emerging technologies**: Support for the selection, implementation, and integration of advanced digital tools and systems.

- **Funding & investment support**: identify and access suitable financial opportunities.

- **Integrated support & multi-service platforms**: combined services delivered in a coordinated approach.

- **Market development & promotion**: expand market reach and visibility of offering.

- **Networking & collaboration**: engage with innovation clusters and networks.

- **Policy & advocacy**: support in navigating and engaging with policy frameworks.

- **R&D and innovation**: develop, test, and implement innovative solutions.

- **Sustainability & green transition**: implement sustainable practices and green technologies.

- **Training and skills development**: enhance capabilities through targeted training.

Please indicate which services you would like to procure for the part of the implementation of your transformation project and explain how they will contribute to achieving your transformation goals. You may propose other external service not explicitly listed above but that is relevant to the successful implementation of your transformation journey.

## 8.1.2. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to include in the proposal

To evaluate the **expected impact** of your business transformation project, you must provide **KPIs**. These indicators help assess both the **environmental** and **socio-economic** outcomes of your project.

When submitting your proposal, please make sure to:

- Include only the KPIs that are relevant to your project.

- Quantify each KPI in absolute terms (e.g., tons, euros, number of jobs, hours) and in percentage (% change).

- Describe your calculation method clearly, including the source of the data used (e.g., previous years' data, studies, or official benchmarks).

Your proposal must contribute to at least one environmental and one socio-economic impact listed below.

**Environmental KPIs**

These indicators assess how your project will improve sustainability and resource efficiency.

*Table 44. Description of Environmental impacts.*

| Environmental Impact | Description | Unit of measure |
|---|---|---|
| **Reduction of waste generated** | Quantity of SME's wastes reduced, identifying the typology of waste reduced (according to European Waste Catalogue[1]). | % of reduction related to 1 year of activity. |
| | | Ton of waste reduction related to 1 year of activity. |
| **Reduction of primary raw materials consumption** | Decrease in use of virgin raw materials (e.g. metals, minerals, fossils, fuels and biomass) in production processes, favoring secondary or | % of reduction related to 1 year of activity. |
| | | Ton of primary raw materials consumption related to 1 year of activity. |

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[1] European Commission. (2014). *Commission Decision of 18 December 2014 amending Decision 2000/532/EC on the list of waste pursuant to Directive 2008/98/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council*. Official Journal of the European Union, L 370, 44–86. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32014D0955

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| Environmental Impact | Description | Unit of measure |
|---|---|---|
| | recycled materials, according to Circular Economy Action Plan[2]. | |
| GHG emissions reduction | SME's GHG emission reduction, determined according to GHG Protocol[3] calculation methods or other equivalent suitable EU or international standard | % of reduction related to 1 year of activity. |
| | | Ton of $CO_2e$ reduced related to 1 year of activity. |
| Primary Energy Savings | Primary Energy Savings related to SME consumption, determined according to calculation method acceptable for compliance with art. 7 of the Energy Efficiency Directive[4] or other equivalent suitable EU or international standard. | % of energy saving related to 1 year of activity. |
| | | Ton of oil equivalent (toe) of primary energy saved related to 1 year of activity. |
| Increase recycling rates | Improving quantity and quality of recovered raw materials[5]: improvement in both quantity (mass of material recovered) and quality (degree of purity and usability) of recycled materials, contributing to circular economy goals | % of increase related to 1 year of activity, specifying the recovered raw material typology. |
| | | Ton of recovered raw material increasing related to 1 year of activity. |
| Reduction in use of chemicals likely to be (eco) toxic, bio-accumulative or mobile | Reduction in the consumption of hazardous chemicals that have the potential for environmental and human health harm, based on regulatory lists such as REACH's Substances of Very High Concern (SVHC) or similar. | % of reduction related to 1 year of activity. |
| | | Ton or liters reduced related to 1 year of activity. |

[2]European Commission. (2020). *Circular economy action plan: For a cleaner and more competitive Europe*. Publications Office of the European Union. https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/9dc6aa01-39d2-11eb-b27b-01aa75ed71a1

[3] World Resources Institute & World Business Council for Sustainable Development. (2004). *The Greenhouse Gas Protocol: A corporate accounting and reporting standard (Revised Edition)*. https://ghgprotocol.org/sites/default/files/standards/ghg-protocol-revised.pdf

[4]Labanca, N., & Bertoldi, P. (2016). *Energy savings calculation methods under Article 7 of the Energy Efficiency Directive* (EUR 27663 EN). Publications Office of the European Union. https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC99698/report%20on%20eed%20art%207%20-%20publishable.pdf

[5] European Environment Agency. (2024, December 5). *Measuring the quality of recycling*. https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/analysis/publications/measuring-the-quality-of-recycling

**Socio-Economic KPIs (Expected After 3-5 Years)**

These indicators evaluate the broader business, employment, and training impacts of your transformation.

*Table 55. Description of socio-economic impacts.*

| Socio-economic impacts after 3-5 years | Description | Unit of measure |
|---|---|---|
| **Foreseen investment** | Foreseen investment to adopt business transformation, including adoption of advanced technology: this refers to the projected financial resources that the SME plans to allocate for implementing changes in its business operations. This includes the integration of advanced technologies. | € of Investment |
| **Turnover or sales** | Total revenue generated by the SME from its business activities, typically measured over a specific period. It represents the income from selling goods or services before any expenses are deducted | € of income |
| **New jobs (FTE)** | FTE stands for Full-Time Equivalent. This metric indicates the number of new full-time positions created by the SME, within the transformation journey and after 3-5 years. | number of new jobs intended to be created |
| **Training or peer-learning activities** | Foreseen number of training courses or peer-learning activities for upskilling and/or reskilling: this refers to the anticipated number of educational or training programs that the SME plans to offer to its employees. These programs aim to enhance employees' skills (upskilling) or teach them new skills (reskilling) to adapt to changing job requirements or technological advancement. | N° of courses and n° of hours, specifying the topic and the typology of activities |

## 9. How your proposal will be evaluated

The evaluation of your proposal will follow a two-step process:

1. Internal review by MANTRA partners: the MANTRA consortium will first assess all submitted proposals for eligibility and completeness.
2. *External Expert evaluation: proposals deemed eligible will then be evaluated by* **three independent external experts**, selected for their experience in advanced technology, innovation strategy, and social/environmental impact.

These experts will be contracted by the consortium and required to sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) before accessing any application materials. Each evaluator will receive the complete proposal package and will have four working weeks to carry out the evaluation.

Then, he/she will score the proposal with a mark from 1 to 5 (with 0.5 resolution) on each of the five areas of evaluation, shown in the table Table 66. Following the approach adopted in the evaluation of Horizon project proposals, the marks are to be given according to the following scale:

**1. Poor:** the criterion is inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.
**2. Fair:** the proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses.
**3. Good**: the proposal addresses the criterion well, but a number of shortcomings are present.
**4. Very good**: the proposal addresses the criteria very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present.
**5. Excellent:** the proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.

Below are summarized the five areas of evaluation and the potential scoring:

*Table 66. Potential Scoring of the five areas of evaluation.*

| AREAS OF EVALUATION | | POTENTIAL SCORING |
|---|---|---|
| **Project execution and MANTRA support** | When analysing this section, evaluators will specifically assess the overall description, in particular the level of readiness of the proposed actions and the coherence of the requested MANTRA support. | *From 1 to 5* |
| **Digital approach** | When analysing this section, evaluators will specifically assess innovation potential and is beyond the state of the art (e.g., focus on emerging technologies, low penetration on the specific sector). | *From 1 to 5* |
| **Business approach** | Industrial relevance, potential impact (turnover, employment, market size, IP management, sales, return on investment and profit), ambitions and business view, among others. | *From 1 to 5* |
| **Environmental approach** | When analysing this section, evaluators will specifically assess the robustness and level of ambition of the expected environmental impacts and alignment with Green Deal objectives. The KPIs calculated by the applicant will be evaluated considering also in quantitative terms the impacts to be achieved. | *From 1 to 5* |

| AREAS OF EVALUATION | | POTENTIAL SCORING |
|---|---|---|
| **Social approach** | When analysing this section, evaluators will specifically assess the alignment with the Sustainable development Goals (SDGs). The KPIs calculated by the applicant will be evaluated considering also in quantitative terms the impacts to be achieved. | *From 1 to 5* |

**In addition to the scores**, each evaluator could assign more "bonuses" to each proposal, whose presence will be considered in the elaboration of the final ranking. These bonuses are related to the following topics:

*Table 7. Additional points ("bonus") description.*

| BONUS CATEGORY | CRITERIA | SCORE |
|---|---|---|
| **Innovation** (from 0 to 1) | Not innovative | 0 |
| | Innovative (technologies demonstrated in a few cases of specific manufacturing subsectors) | 0.5 |
| | Highly innovative (lower TRL technologies or not) | 1 |
| **Pathway Maturity** (from 0 to 1) | Entry-level proposal | 0 |
| | Conceptual design-level proposal | 0.5 |
| | Deployment-level proposal | 1 |
| **Quality of Supporting Documents** (from 0 to 1) | No supporting documents or no added value | 0 |
| | Documents provide sufficient added value | 0.5 |
| | Documents provide significant added value (especially in English) | 1 |
| **Equal Opportunities (Gender Representation)** | SME legal representative (or similar role) is a woman. Additionally, a significant percentage of the SME's workforce are women. | 1 |

**Evaluation criteria**

Proposals will be scored on:

- **Project readiness**: Feasibility, timeline, and preparation.

- **Strength of the approach**:

  o Digital: use of digital technologies (e.g., AI, IoT).

  o Business: strategy, investment plan, scalability.

  o Environmental: sustainability outcomes.

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  o   Social: inclusion, training, job creation.

- **Minimum Impact Requirements**: must show at least one measurable environmental and one measurable socio-economic impact (based on defined KPIs).

**Ranking and Final Selection**

Once evaluations are complete:

- An **average score** per criterion will be calculated across the three evaluators.

- **Bonus points** (up to 4 additional) may be awarded for:

  o   High innovation level
  o   Maturity of the transformation pathway
  o   Quality of documentation
  o   Promotion of gender equality

The maximum possible score is 29 points. In the case of tied scores, the submission timestamp on the MANTRA Digital Platform will be used as a tiebreaker (the earliest submission will take precedence).

## 10. Data protection

As part of the evaluation and selection process, MANTRA will gather personal and business-related data from applicants. The MANTRA Facilitating Platform is responsible for handling this data in strict adherence to the General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR). The MANTRA platform's security protocols and operational procedures are designed to safeguard the confidentiality and integrity of the collected information. To proceed with their application, all applicants must agree to the terms and conditions of the MANTRA platform. Additionally, MANTRA will only request the essential information required for the assessment and implementation of the funding program, ensuring that data collection remains limited to what is strictly necessary. Please refer to https://babele.co/terms-of-use/ to check MANTRA platform data privacy policy and security measures.

## 11. Helpdesk contact information

For any questions or clarifications related to the MANTRA call for SMEs, please contact the Helpdesk at: **info@mantra-project.eu.**

The MANTRA Helpdesk team is available to assist you with any inquiries regarding the process, eligibility, information requirements, or technical issues. Please allow up to 2 business days for a response.

⚠️ NOTE

**This template is designed to assist applicants in preparing the application form for the MANTRA 1st call. It serves only as an example. The applications must be built and submitted through the online MANTRA application form available through the following link** MANTRA application **and also available via MANTRA website:** https://mantra-project.eu/.

**We recommend that applicants submit their proposals well in advance of the specified deadline to ensure that all required fields are completed and that their submissions are accepted.**

## Application Form Template

1. **SME description**

**1.1 Company Name**

**1.2 Company Subsector**

- ☐ Machinery (C28, C27, C26)
- ☐ Food (C10, C11)
- ☐ Textile (C13, C14, C15)
- ☐ Plastics (C22)
- ☐ Ceramics(C23)
- ☐ Metals (C24, C25)

**1.3 Country of Operation**

**1.4 Company Size**

- ☐ The company qualifies as an SME according to the EU definition. (SME status should be checked by applicants using the EU SME self-assessment questionnaire)

**1.5 Website:**

**1.6 VAT number:**

**1.7 Address:**

**1.8 Contact person:**

**Name and surname**

**Email**

**Telephone number (optional)**

Is the legal representative (or equivalent role) of this SME a woman?

☐ Yes

☐ No

**1.9 Legal representative** (or equivalent role) of the SME:

**Name and surname**

**Email**

**Role**

## 2. Proposed transformation project (score 1 to 5)

In this section, please provide a description of your business transformation proposal including objectives, technologies[6] involved and expected impacts, the actions foreseen, the roles and responsibilities of the involved actors, investment size. Please take into account here the information obtained in your self-assessment

### 2.1 Proposal at a Glance

Provide a brief overview of your proposed business transformation project.

Max. 1000 characters

### 2.2.1 Project idea and degree of innovation

Provide a description of your business transformation project and how it will be implemented. Highlight the degree of innovation involved (this may include metrics such as the Technology Readiness Level (TRL). Also, outline the key barriers or challenges you anticipate for its implementation

Max. 4000 characters

### 2.2.2 Technology involved

Which technology involves your proposal (select one or more options)

- ☐ advanced materials
- ☐ advanced manufacturing
- ☐ artificial intelligence

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[6] https://ati.ec.europa.eu/

- ☐ augmented and virtual reality
- ☐ big data
- ☐ blockchain
- ☐ cloud technologies
- ☐ connectivity
- ☐ industrial biotechnology
- ☐ Internet of Things
- ☐ micro and nanoelectronics
- ☐ mobility
- ☐ nanotechnology
- ☐ photonics
- ☐ robotics
- ☐ security
- ☐ Other

### 2.2.3 Will your business transformation lead to any of the following results?

If so, please explain how.

Max. 2000 characters

| EXPECTED RESULTS | |
|---|---|
| **Raw Material** | Substitution of (critical) raw materials, second life and recycling. |
| **Safe and sustainable by design approach** | Chemicals, materials and products designed, produced, and used in a way which does not harm people and the environment. The applicants are expected to result (when applicable) in one of the following solutions:<br><br>a) New sustainable-by-design materials or products with enhanced functionalities and applications in manufacturing process;<br>b) New or sub substitute materials that provide solutions for clean, toxic/pollutant free environment;<br>c) Solution to strengthen cross-sectoral cooperation along the value chain to establish resilient and circular value chains. |
| **Circular Economy-circular value chains** | Solutions to strengthens cross-sectorial cooperation along the value chain to establish resilient and circular value chains. The applicants are expected to result (when applicable) in one of the following solutions:<br><br>a) New sustainable-by-design materials or products with enhanced functionalities and applications in manufacturing process; |

| EXPECTED RESULTS | |
|---|---|
| | b) New or sub substitute materials that provide solutions for clean, toxic/pollutant free environment;<br>c) Solution to strengthen cross-sectoral cooperation along the value chain to establish resilient and circular value chains. |
| **Clean and affordable energy and energy efficiency** | Implementation of innovative technologies and strategies to optimize energy consumption, integrate renewable energy sources, and enhance efficiency, leading to reduced energy costs, lower carbon emissions, and increased sustainability in industrial processes. |
| **Supply chain resilience** | Implementation of strategies and practices to enhance the supply chain's flexibility, adaptability, and resilience, enabling it to quickly respond and recover from disruptions |

## 2.3 Investment size

Explain the estimated investment.

> Max. 1000 characters

## 2.4 Readiness of the proposed action

Description of work already carried out (planning done, feasibility studies completed, licenses/permitting obtained, draft contracts or technical/economic proposals available, etc.), if applicable.

> Max. 1000 characters

### 3. Main approach of the project:

The proposal should clearly define the project's main approach, and its credibility. It is specified that a credible pathway for business transformation refers to a well-defined, realistic, and evidence-based approach that demonstrates how the SME's proposed activities will lead to measurable and sustainable improvements in the targeted impact areas. Indeed, the evaluation phase will analyse the four approaches, where applicable to the specific project.

#### 3.1 **Environmental approach (score 1 to 5)**

Define the expected environmental outcomes of your project, emphasizing their robustness and level of ambition. Demonstrate the credibility of your environmental impacts by providing quantitative and qualitative evidence where possible.

Max. 2000 characters.

**3.1.1 Will your transformation contribute to any of the following environmental impacts in 1 year of activity (see full description in Guidelines for Applicant)?**

| Impact | Yes/No | Quantification (% / absolute value) | Explanation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Reduction of waste generated | | | |
| Reduction of primary raw materials consumption | | | |
| GHG emissions reduction | | | |
| Primary Energy Savings | | | |
| Increase recycling rates (improving quantity and quality of recovered raw materials) | | | |
| Reduction in use of chemicals likely to be (eco) toxic, bio-accumulative or mobile | | | |
| Other environmental benefits defined by the applicant | | | |

3.2 **Digital approach (score 1 to 5)**

Describe the digital and technological aspects of your project, highlighting its innovation potential beyond the current state of the art. Focus on the use of advanced or emerging technologies, particularly those with low penetration in your sector. Explain how these technologies contribute to the specific transformation and offer a competitive advantage. The evaluation will consider the technological novelty of your approach, the relevance and application of advanced or emerging tech, and the significance of the innovation within your industry context.

Max. 2000 characters.

### 3.3 Business approach (score 1 to 5)

Describe the business dimension of your project, demonstrating its industrial relevance and potential for market impact. Outline your business ambitions and vision, including how the project is expected to contribute to growth in terms of turnover, employment, market expansion, and return on investment (you can provide information on market size, competitive positioning, sales strategy, intellectual property (IP) management and profit expectations). If applicable, include expected economic savings and estimated payback time.

Max. 2000 characters.

### 3.4 Social approach (score 1 to 5)

Explain how your project promotes inclusion, diversity, gender equality, and any broader benefits for society

Max. 2000 characters.

| Will your transformation contribute to any of the following socio-economic targets after 3-5 years? | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Impact | Yes/No | Quantification | Explanation |
| 3.4.1 Foreseen investment to adopt business transformation, including adoption of advanced technology (≥0.5 M€) | | M€ | |
| 3.4.2 Turnover or sales (≥10-15%) | | %/€ | |
| 3.4.3 New jobs (≥ 2-4 FTE) | | FTE | |
| 3.4.4 Foreseen number of training courses or peer-learning activities for upskilling and/or Reskilling (≥ 2-4) | | N° | |
| 3.4.5 Other | | | |

### 4 Requested MANTRA support

Please indicate which consortium advisory and support services you would like to request from MANTRA. Select up to 3 services you believe will best support the implementation of your proposed transformation project. These services are designed to assist with various aspects of project execution, ensuring you have the guidance and resources needed to successfully achieve your objectives. The final selection and configuration of services provided for each applicant will be determined during the comprehensive assessment of the selected beneficiaries.

| Category | Name | Description |
|---|---|---|
| **Consultancy and advisory services** | **Tech Adoption** | Support for SMEs to implement Socio-technical solutions (e.g. AI, IoT, and robotics for process optimization, energy efficiency, and emissions reduction). Includes services for testing and implementing digital solutions for energy efficiency, emissions tracking, and process optimization before full deployment. |
| | **Proof of concept** | Help define technical and market feasibility and interpret results to guide go/no-go decisions. |
| | **Technology transfer** | Identify suitable technologies, facilitate licensing agreements, mediate between research institutions and companies, and manage the integration of new technology into existing operations. |
| | **Design management** | Support SMEs in structuring and guiding their design processes strategically. This includes aligning design with business goals, integrating sustainability or circular economy principles, in coordination of design activities across teams (with external consultants), align product design with business strategy, optimize user experience. |
| | **Designing pilot process and prototyping** | Design and set up pilot lines or experimental setups, run feasibility tests, interpret technical results, and recommend adjustments for scaling. Connect SMEs to testbeds or fabrication services. |
| | **Investment readiness** | Assist with business planning, financial modeling, due diligence prep, and aligning the business model with investor expectations. |
| | **Circular business model canvas (BMS)** | Map current and future models, identify circular opportunities, and integrate resource efficiency and reuse into the value proposition, supply chain, and revenue streams. |
| | **New business model** | Analyze market and competitor data, co-develop new revenue strategies, add new value chains, and validate models through customer feedback and iterative testing. |
| | **Social innovation** | Identify community needs, design inclusive business models or services, evaluate social impact, and help secure funding for socially driven innovation. |
| | **Lean Manufacturing** | Evaluate existing production processes to identify inefficiencies and sources of waste (e.g., overproduction, downtime, excess inventory). Then propose tools and solutions to reduce waste and train staff to track and maintain improvements. |
| | **Market entry and expansion strategy development** | Conduct market research, regulatory analysis, competitor benchmarking, channel strategy, and local partnership identification to support entry or scaling in target markets. |
| | **Innovation road mapping** | Creation of a strategic roadmap that outlines innovation priorities over time, gathering input from stakeholders, assessing market and technology trends, and define development phases and milestones |

| Category | Name | Description |
|---|---|---|
| | **Intellectual property rights** | Support services to help SMEs identify, protect, and manage intellectual property assets such as patents, trademarks, copyrights, and trade secrets. Includes IPR audits, guidance on filing procedures, freedom-to-operate analysis, and advice on IP strategy to maximize competitive advantage and innovation potential. May involve training and connection to legal or patent experts. |
| | **Life Cycle Assessment (LCA), Social Life Cycle Assessment (s-LCA) or Life Cycle Costing (LCC)** | Conduct assessments using ISO standards, compile data across the value chain, quantify impacts, and deliver actionable insights to improve sustainability performance. |
| | **GHG emission calculation** | Perform scope 1, 2, and 3 emissions analysis using tools and recognized protocols, develop reduction strategies, and assist with reporting (e.g., ISO 14067 or GHG Protocol) |
| | **Energy Audit and/or Energy consumption analysis** | Conduct onsite audits, analyze consumption patterns, recommend efficiency upgrades, and quantify potential savings. |
| **Regulatory guidance and compliance support** | **Adaptation to standards** | Guide compliance with technical standards (e.g., ISO 9001, ISO 14001, ISO 50001), conduct gap analyses, develop documentation, and support audits and certification processes (if applicable) |
| | **Adaptation to environmental rules** | Interpret relevant regulations (e.g., REACH, RoHS, EU Taxonomy), conduct compliance checks, advise on reporting obligations, and assist with permitting. |
| **Training and Capacity building** | **Skill development and specific training** | Expert-led sessions on energy efficiency, waste reduction, product life cycle assessment, and decarbonization strategies. Industry-specific programs with digital tools for carbon footprint tracking and emissions reduction planning. Some initiatives also provide continuous technical support and mentoring programs to assist companies in implementing best practices in sustainability and digital transformation. |
| **Networking and partnership opportunities** | **Matchmaking with technological or social partners** | Platforms for SMEs, researchers, and industry leaders to collaborate on circular economy initiatives, digital transformation, and sustainable production. Matchmaking events, working groups, and knowledge-sharing forums. Includes innovation hubs and sector-specific events to foster collaboration between companies, research centres, and policymakers. |

## 5. Services to be procured with the grant

The grant will be used to procure a range of services that support the project's objectives and align with the eligible categories. These services are designed to foster innovation, enhance digital capabilities, promote sustainability, and strengthen market positioning.

Please select from the list below the category of services you intend to procure for your project implementation. The final selection and configuration of services for each applicant will be determined during the comprehensive assessment of the selected beneficiaries:

- ☐ Specialized consultancy, advisor and/or coaching services
- ☐ Prototyping, pilot testing and/or demonstration
- ☐ Feasibility studies
- ☐ Use of testing facilities
- ☐ Adaptation of business processes
- ☐ Digitalization & emerging technologies
- ☐ Funding & investment support
- ☐ Integrated support & multi-service platforms
- ☐ Market development & promotion
- ☐ Networking & collaboration
- ☐ Policy & advocacy
- ☐ R&D and innovation
- ☐ Sustainability & green transition
- ☐ Training and skills development
- ☐ Other

Please for the indicated services explain how they will contribute to achieving your transformation goals. You may propose other external service not explicitly listed above but that is relevant to the successful implementation of your transformation journey.

Max. 1500 characters

Files to upload: Declaration of Honour

Self-assessment pdf file

Supporting documents

**Funded by the European Union**