Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Elise 2st Open Call

Open date for proposals: 8 December 2022 at 13:00 CET (Brussels Time).
Deadline:16 February 2023 at 13:00 CET (Brussels Time).

Version 1/2022

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1. What is ELISE?

ELISE [European Network of AI Excellence Centres] is a network of artificial intelligence research hubs. Based on the highest level research, it spreads its knowledge and methods in academia, industry and society.

ELISE aims to make Europe competitive in AI through a network of excellence. The best European researchers in machine learning and AI work together to attract talent, to foster research through collaboration, and to inspire and be inspired by industry and society.

ELISE builds upon the ELLIS (European Laboratory for Learning and Intelligent Systems) network. ELISE Consortium is composed of 23 organisations and coordinated by the Aalto University.

2. Why should you apply?

ELISE will select **16 SMEs that develop novel AI-based services or applications** with the support of a Scientific Advisor in one of the ELISE/ELLIS focus areas.
Selected companies will enter the **6-month** program and receive:

- **Up to € 60.000 (lump sum)** to develop novel AI-based applications in one of the ELISE focus areas.
- Visibility through ELISE online channels and events, and dissemination in the ELLIS community.

3. Who can apply?

The applicants should be an **SME** - at the moment of applying, applicants must be **registered legal entities** established in:

- The Member States of the European Union and its Overseas Countries and Territories (OCT) or
- Associated Countries to H2020 or
- The United Kingdom.

The ELISE partners, or their affiliates or employees, are NOT considered as eligible applicants and can NOT apply for funding.

4. What is an SME?

An SME will be considered as such if it complies with the European Commission's Recommendation 2003/361/EC. As a summary, the criteria defining an SME are:

- ➔ Headcount in Annual Work Unit (AWU) less than 250;
- ➔ Annual turnover less or equal to €50 million OR annual balance sheet total less or equal to €43 million.

Note that the figures of partners and linked enterprises should also be considered as stated in the SME user guide. For detailed information check EU recommendation: https://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/business-friendly-environment/sme-definition_en.

5. Are the applicants from the UK, Switzerland or Israel eligible?

Yes, organisations registered in the UK and in the H2020 associated countries like Switzerland or Israel are eligible to apply and be funded by the ELISE Open Call.

6. Can an ELISE Consortium Member apply to this call?

No, the ELISE Consortium Partners cannot participate in this open call.

7. Can I create a consortium to apply?

No, this call is dedicated only to single-company projects.

8. Can I apply if the SME is not yet established?

The SME must be registered as a legal entity at the moment of applying (you should register your company before you submit your application).

9. What kind of activities are we looking for?

ELISE is looking for projects based on AI applications that address the development and implementation of technology and systems related to **focus areas** listed below. Focus areas are based on ELISE/ELLIS research programs but are not limited to them as long as the proposals will address high-impact societal and economic challenges using machine learning.

10. What are the focus areas?

- Geometric Deep Learning: graph, group and gauge convolutions
- Robust Machine Learning
- Interactive Learning and Interventional Representations
- Machine Learning and Computer Vision
- Robot Learning: Closing the Reality Gap
- Human-centric Machine Learning
- Theory, Algorithms and Computations of Modern Learning Systems
- Quantum and physics based Machine Learning
- Natural Intelligence
- Health
- Machine Learning in Earth and Climate Sciences
- Natural Language Processing (NLP)
- Multimedia / multimodal information
- Information retrieval
- Explainability and Fairness in Data Mining
- Symbolic Machine Learning

Description of focus areas is available in the Guide for Applicants, **Annex 2**.
Additional information are also included here: https://ellis.eu/programs

11. My project is outside the focus area. Can I still apply?

You are encouraged to try to address at least one of the ELISE/ELLIS focus areas. However, even if your project does not fall under any of the categories listed, it can still be considered for funding. Remember, it should nonetheless have a clear connection to AI/ML and address high-impact societal and economic challenges using machine learning.

12. What project could be a perfect candidate for the ELISE Open Call?

The ideal project is the use case of machine learning technology by an SME that fits in at least one of the focus areas. The project should be supported by the Scientific Advisor, who creates the link between industry and research. A successful project can lead to further collaboration between the SME and the Scientific Advisor. You can find examples of successful projects from the 1st Open Call in the Guide for Applicants.

13. Which TRL is expected?

The preferable initial TRL (Technology Readiness Level) should be **TRL 6-7,** while the initial IRL (Investment) should be **IRL 6-7**, but applications at lower TRL and IRL can be accepted.

14. What is TRL?

TRL - Technology Readiness Level- Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) are indicators of the maturity level of particular technologies. This measurement system provides a common understanding of technology status and addresses the entire innovation chain.

There are nine technology readiness levels; TRL 1 is the lowest and TRL 9 the highest. In our project we refer to Annex G of the General Annexes to the Work Programme 2016/17 for a full description of TRLs.

15. What is IRL?

Investment Readiness Level is a scale that runs from 1 to 9 and defines the different stages of a start-up maturity in relation to value creation and preparedness for commercialization. Investment Readiness can be applied to any type of product, service, technology, and social innovation.
IRL is an evidence-based demonstration to investors that there's a repeatable and scalable business model.

16. Can solutions with TRL or IRL lower than expected be funded?

Applications with lower TRL and IRL can be accepted as long as the applicant presents the road map to reach the higher TRL level.

17. Who is a Scientific Advisor?

A Scientific Advisor is a researcher invited by the applicant, who agreed to advise the SME in developing the AI application or service. The Advisor must have a PhD in a field that is relevant to the project.

The advisor must be independent and cannot have any formal links with the applicant (NDA, non-disclosure agreement will not be considered as a formal link).

18. What is the role of the Scientific Advisor?

The role of the Scientific Advisor is strictly advisory, meaning that the advisor cannot participate in the project work, nor receive funding from it or any remuneration. Therefore (s)he cannot have any claims to IPR of the project.

19. What are the tasks of the Scientific Advisor?

The main tasks of the Scientific Advisor are the following:

- Application stage: writes a short motivation letter (the form of an email is accepted) on why (s)he supports and advises the SME's project,
- Selection stage: provides support to the applicant during the online Jury Day,
- Implementation stage: advices on the execution of the project,
- End of the project: provides a short statement giving her/his perspective on the outputs of the project. This statement is a part of the final assessment of the project results before the final payment.

20. When should I invite the Scientific Advisor?

You can invite the Scientific Advisor at any time in the process of applying to the Open Call but not later than before Jury Day. We strongly encourage you to have your Advisor at the moment of applying. This aspect will be taken into account by external evaluators during the evaluation of your proposal.

21. Is the Scientific Advisor's letter of support compulsory (statement)?

The letter of support from the Scientific Advisor is not compulsory **until the Jury Day**, however, we strongly encourage you to provide the letter of support at the moment of applying by uploading it in section "PROJECT" of the application form).
The letter of support (statement) from the Scientific Advisor is an important factor in the evaluation of your project. Having the letter from the Scientific Advisor will strengthen your proposal and increase the chance to be selected for the next evaluation stage.

22. What formats of the Scientific Advisor's letter of support are accepted?

We accept the letters of support from the Scientific Advisor in either JPEG or PDF format.

23. Does the signature from the Scientific Advisor have to be a QES?

No, the signature of the Scientific Advisor in the letter of support can be a facsimile or an e-signature.

24. Where can I find a Scientific Advisor?

We highly recommend you to look for the Scientific Advisor in the ELLIS/ELISE community (https://ellis.eu/members). You can also invite a Scientific Advisor outside the ELLIS/ELISE community .

25. What documents are required from a Scientific Advisor?

In the Application Form, you can provide the name and surname of your Scientific Advisor as well as a link to the LinkedIn profile or webpage (e.g. ORCID, Researchgate) of the researcher you invited to prove her/his expertise in Machine Learning.

If you are selected for the Jury Day pitch, you should also have a short motivation letter (letter of support) in the form of a statement from the researcher explaining why he/she would like to advise you on this project. We encourage you to submit the statement (letter of support) as an attachment to your application form.

26. What happens if the company does not have a Scientific Advisor?

Having a Scientific Advisor is an important element for the success of your application. If you fail to find a Scientific Advisor for your project before Jury Day, your project cannot enter the Jury Day and be selected for funding.

27. What are the requirements for a Scientific Advisor?

The Scientific Advisor must have a PhD in a field that is relevant for the project. Moreover, a Scientific Advisor cannot have a formal link with the SME (e.g. be co-founder, member of the advisory board, employee or have another potential conflict of interest). This will be evaluated case by case.

28. Does the Scientific Advisor get paid for his/her services?

Scientific Advisor cannot get paid by the team (s)he is advising or receive any other remuneration for advising ELISE Open Call participants. His/her benefits for participating in the ELISE project are:

- the suggested open call project has high impact potential and it is related to the Advisor's published research, so (s)he would gather "impact points" through the publications prepared based on the project he advised to,
- the Scientific Advisor could be invited to cooperate with the company after the open call project is finished.

29. Will I get an extra score for having a Scientific Advisor?

There is no additional score point for having a Scientific Advisor. At the same time, having a Scientific Advisor will be taken into account during the entire evaluation process and is a crucial element for the project to be selected for funding.

30. What is an ethics self-assessment?

The ethics self-assessment is intended to identify the ethical risk related to your project. This process is based on an on-line questionnaire where you answer ethical questions related to your proposed project. This allows for an initial clarification of ethical aspects you may need to pay attention to in designing and implementing your project.

31. Is the ethics self-assessment compulsory?

Yes, after submission of your proposal, you will be invited to fill in the ethics self-assessment questionnaire on Saidot platform. You will receive an email with a link and instruction on how to proceed. You have 1 month after the open call deadline **(until 16 March 2023)** to fill in the form in order to have a chance to be pre-selected for the Jury Day. Not completing this step will automatically eliminate you from the further phases of the selection process. You should complete the ethics self-assessment only once.

32. Who needs to go through a full ethical evaluation?

Candidates invited for the Jury Day (up to 32 SMEs) will go through a full ethics evaluation with the support of ethics experts. This evaluation will be based on the ethics self-evaluation filled in earlier and needs to be completed before the Jury Day.

33. Where can I find the ethics self-assessment form?

The ethics self-assessment form will be shared with you by email, after submission of proposal and the open call deadline.

34. Is it possible to fail the ethics assessment?

It is very unlikely; the self-assessment is not an exam. It is a tool to help the applicants design the best projects in terms of ethical standards for AI. Keep in mind that all ethical risks identified in the self-assessment will need to be addressed accordingly during your project implementation.

35. What help is available for the ethics self-assessment?

You can firstly check the materials available on the open call website: https://elise2oc.fundingbox.com/. You can also send your questions regarding the form and ethical issues related to your project to Saidot (info@saidot.ai).

36. When is the deadline for submitting a proposal?

We will evaluate **only** proposals submitted through the online form (https://elise2oc.fundingbox.com/) within the **deadline 16 February 2023, 13:00 CET (Brussels Time).** Upon receipt of each proposal, the system will send you a **confirmation** of your submission.

37. What happens if I do not submit my proposal within the deadline?

We do not accept applications after the deadline. We strongly encourage you not to wait until the last minute to submit your proposal. Failure to meet the submission deadline for any reason, including extenuating circumstances, will result in the rejection of the proposal.

38. How long does it take to fill in the application?

It shouldn't take more than 1-2 working days on average. Take into account that specific character limits are set in each field of the online application form, so we encourage you to keep your proposal focused on the requested information, keeping in mind the ELISE concept and the requirements gathered in the Guide for Applicants for this call.
We also recommend you to start the submission process quite in advance before the deadline in order to avoid last-minute problems.

39. Can a company submit more than 1 application?

No, you cannot submit more than one application. If more than one proposal is identified, only the last proposal which has been submitted in order of time (most recent counting back from the deadline) will be evaluated.

40. Will I be able to modify my proposal after submission?

Yes, you can EDIT your application after you submit it before the deadline, as many times as you wish.

41. What are the selection criteria?

Each proposal will be evaluated by external evaluators with 3 main awarding criteria, that is: Excellence, Impact and Implementation. Detailed description you will find in the Guide for Applicants, Section 4.3

42. What type of support is available for preparing the proposal?

The 'Guide for Applicants' is the main reference document. It provides detailed information about the requirements of the evaluation and selection process, and the Support Program offered by ELISE.
If you encounter any technical problems when filling in the application form, contact info.elise@fundingbox.com and we will do our best to help you.

43. How to write a proposal that convinces evaluators?

Make sure you do not leave any information out of your proposal. Be specific and provide precise answers to the questions in the application form.

44. What happens after the proposal is submitted?

Immediately after the deadline for applications submission, the evaluation procedure will start. The evaluation process is transparent, fair and equal to all our participants. The evaluation is composed of the following phases: eligibility check, pre-scoring, external evaluation, consensus meeting and Jury Day. See section 4 of the Guide for Applicants for this call for further details,

45. What are the different evaluation phases and the expected schedule?

The table below presents the indicative dates in which each of the evaluation phases will end and the number of expected applicants that would go through to the next phase.

Phase	**Time**	**Approximate Date**	**Number of applicants passing to the Next Phase**
Eligibility Check & Pre-Scoring	4 (working) days	17/02/2023 - 22/02/2023	100
Expert Evaluation	Approx. 6 week	23/02/2023 - 01/04/2023	Up to 100
Consensus Meeting & Communication	1 day	April 2023	Up to 32
Jury Day	1 day	End of April 2023	Up to 16
Finalist Communication	1 day	May 2023	-
Legal Check (including SM status check)	3-4 weeks	May - June 2023	Up to 16

46. What happens during the online Jury Day?

If your project is among the finalists, you will be invited to an online Jury Day, where you will have the opportunity to pitch your project in front of the 'Open Call Selection Committee'. Before Jury Day, you will receive specific questions formulated by the 'Open Call Selection Committee' that should be addressed during your pitch.

During Jury Day, your Scientific Advisor should explain why he/she is supporting your project. Sending a pitch presentation and attending the Jury Day together with a Scientific Advisor will be mandatory requirements for the finalists; not attending any of these requirements will automatically imply the exclusion of the proposal from the list. After the Jury Day, the ELISE 'Open Call Selection Committee' will select the final beneficiaries and create a 'Reserve List'. More on this can be found in the Guide for Applicants, Section 4.5.

47. What mandatory documents need to be gathered for Jury Day?

Before the Jury Day, selected finalists will be required to:

- Complete the ethics evaluation with the support of an ethics expert,
- Have confirmed the support of a Scientific Advisor via a Letter of Support,
- Send a pitch presentation (video or slides).

48. What formats are accepted for the Jury Day pitch presentation?

You can pitch your project with the support of a video, a presentation with slides or any other format you find helpful. Be creative and let your project shine.

49. What is a Reserve List?

During a Consensus Meeting, the Selection Committee will select the finalists who will be invited for the Jury Day. The projects with a close overall score (but just outside the top list) will be put on a Reserve List. In case any project from the finalists is unable to participate in the Jury Day, an applicant from the Reserve List may be invited.
Please keep in mind that projects may be placed on the Reserve List also after Jury Day. In case any of the projects selected for funding fail the formal check, applicants from the Reserve List will be invited to the formal check and Sub-grant agreement stage.

50. How do you check the SME status?

Before signing the Sub-grant agreement, we are going to verify your SME status. More specifically, we will request you to provide the following documentation:

- Status information of the beneficiaries.
- SMEs checklist. In the event they declare being non-autonomous: the balance sheet and profit and loss account (with annexes) for the last period for upstream and downstream organisations.
- Financial information. It includes the headcount (AWU), balance, profit & loss accounts of the latest closed financial year and the relation, upstream and downstream, of any linked or partner company.
- Legal existence. Company Register, Official Journal or similar, showing the name of the organisation, the legal address and registration number and, if applicable, a copy of a document proving VAT registration (in case the VAT number does not show on the registration extract or its equivalent). Applicants without a VAT number will have to provide a certificate from their tax authority to confirm their tax ID.
- In cases where either the number of employees or the ownership is not clearly identified: any other supporting documents which demonstrate headcount and ownership such as payroll details, annual reports, national regional, association records, etc.
- Name and position of persons authorised to represent the applicant if not clear from the registration documents.
- Bank identification form.
- Information about participation in other acceleration programmes and another H2020 grants received.

51. What are the payment conditions and schedule?

The selected grantees will receive a fixed lump sum of up to **€60,000 paid in 2 instalments:**

- **€13,000** at M1 after the Sub Grant Agreement is signed and the work plan for the project (including objectives and deliverables) is updated based on the recommendation from the Open Call Selection Committee,
- **€47,000** after the **Final Report** is submitted and validated by the 'Open Call Selection Committee' (the Final Report has to be submitted not later than in M7, one month after the project is finished).

52. How will ELISE review the SMEs performance at the end of the support period?

The SME's performance at the end of the 6-months support period will be reviewed based on the following inputs:

- **Final Report** (prepared by SME) which includes:
    - Description of the results achieved by SME (max. 5 pages),
    - A short summary of the project, which will be published on the ELISE website,
    - Video demonstrating results of the project (max. 5 minutes),
- Short **statement** of the Scientific Advisor on the outputs of the project.

53. What is a lump sum?

The lump sum is a simplified method of settling expenses in projects financed from Horizon 2020 funds. It means that you are not required to present strictly defined accounting documents to prove the cost incurred (e.g. invoices), but you are obliged to demonstrate the implementation of the project in line with the milestones set for it. Simply speaking it means that we will assess your progress and quality of your work during Final Review, not your accountancy. The milestones (objectives and results) must be defined in the application form and (if necessary) elaborated before signing the Sub Grant Agreement.

The lump sum does not release you from the obligation to collect documentation to confirm the costs under fiscal regulation.

54. What services does ELISE offer?

Selected companies will enter the **6-month** program and receive:

- **Up to € 60.000 (lump sum)** to develop novel AI-based applications in one of ELISE focus areas.

- Visibility through ELISE online channels and events, and dissemination in the ELLIS community.

55. Where can I find help with my application?

If you have extra questions regarding our Open Call process you can send us a message to info.elise@fundingbox.com

In case of any technical issues or problems, please include the following information in your message:

- your username, telephone number and your email address;
- details of the specific problem (error messages you encountered, bugs descriptions, i.e. if a dropdown list isn't working, etc.); and
- screenshots of the problem.

56. Is any accountability required on the way the funds have been used, e. g. invoices and other financial documents?

The FSTP beneficiaries will receive a fixed lump sum of up to € 60.000.
The lump sum is a simplified method that means that the FSTP recipient is not required to present accounting documents like invoices, timesheets, etc, to prove that the cost was actually incurred. However, ELISE will assess your progress and quality of your work based on the Final Report and Scientific Advisor statement, not your accountancy. In this sense, we will ask you to demonstrate the implementation of the project in line with the objectives set. In any case, the lump sum methodology does not release you from the obligation to collect documentation to confirm the costs under fiscal regulation.

57. Where can I file a complaint about the results of the evaluation?

Please take into account that the evaluation is run by experts in the given field, and we do not interfere with their assessment, therefore we will not evaluate complaints related to the results of the evaluation other than related to the technical mistakes in the process or mistakes in the evaluation of the eligibility criteria.
If, after receiving the results of one of the evaluation phases (when foreseen), you consider that a mistake has been made, you can send us your complaint. To do so please send us your complaint in English by email to info.elise@fundingbox.com including the following information:

- your contact details (including email address),
- the subject of the complaint,
- information and evidence regarding the alleged breach.

We will not review anonymous complaints as well as complaints with incomplete information.
You have **3 calendar days** to submit your complaint starting the day after the communication about the results of the eligibility criteria evaluation was sent. We will review your complaint within no more than 7 calendar days from its reception. If we need more time to assess your complaint, we will inform you by email about the extension.