GUARDIANS

Frequently Asked Questions
Test Before Invest Open Call

Submission of applications starts: 01/05/2026
Submission deadline: 01/07/2026

Funded by the European Union under the Horizon Europe Framework Programme, Grant Agreement No. 101084468. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or European Research Executive Agency (REA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Executive Summary

Welcome to the GUARDIANS Test Before Invest Open Call **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)**.
This document is designed to provide you with additional insights and clarifications about the GUARDIANS Test Before Invest Open Call. Please note that it serves as a complement to the Guide for Applicants, which should be your first and main resource to read.

These FAQ will be updated regularly based on the questions we receive during the open call application period, ensuring that you have the most up-to-date information.

If you can't find the answer to your question here, please feel free to contact us directly at: ocguardians@ctic.es

Funded by the European Union under the Horizon Europe Framework Programme, Grant Agreement No. 101084468.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary 2
Table of Contents 3
1. General Questions related to GUARDIANS project 5
1.1. What organisations take part in the GUARDIANS project? 5
1.2. Where can I find more information about the project? 5
2. Questions related to the Open Call 6
2.1. Who can apply? 6
2.2. What countries are eligible? 6
2.3. How do I submit my application? 6
2.4. Can one applicant submit two applications? 7
2.5. What happens if I do not submit my application within the deadline? 7
2.6. Will I be able to modify my proposal after submission? 7
2.7. Can I apply if I have received FSTP grants from other projects before? 7
2.8. Can GUARDIANS consortium members apply to this call? 7
2.9. Can farms that have collaborated with the GUARDIANS project apply to this call? 8
2.10. Can project partners help me with the proposal writing? 8
2.11. What is a Conflict of Interest (COI)? 8
3. Questions related to the evaluation process 9
3.1. What happens after my application has been submitted? 9
3.2. What does my proposal need to meet to be eligible? 9
3.3. Who are the expert evaluators? 9
3.4. Who is the Selection Committee? 10
3.5. What is evaluated in the experts evaluation phase? 10
3.6. Are there any extra points? 10
3.7. How is the final score calculated? 11
3.8. What is the minimum score to pass the experts evaluation phase? 11
3.9. How will ties be resolved during the evaluation and selection process? 12
4. Questions related to the funding programme 13
4.1. What is the structure of the funding programme? 13
4.2. What is the payment schedule? 13
4.3. Should we expect any reviews or audits? 13
5. Questions raised during the Open Call: Questions related to eligibility 14
5.1. Does the applicant need to be an individual farmer, or can a private company (SME) that cultivates land also apply? 14
5.2. Can small-scale/home greenhouses be considered eligible as small farms or small agricultural sites under this open call? 14

Funded by the European Union under the Horizon Europe Framework Programme, Grant Agreement No. 101084468.

5.3. WHAT HAPPENS IF MY COUNTRY DOES NOT ISSUE A VAT NUMBER TO AGRICULTURAL HOLDINGS, BUT I HOLD ANOTHER OFFICIAL IDENTIFICATION NUMBER? 14
5.4. IS LIBERIA, WEST AFRICA, ELIGIBLE TO APPLY FOR THIS CALL? 15
5.5. IS ISRAEL ELIGIBLE TO APPLY FOR THIS CALL? 15
6. Questions raised during the Open Call: Questions related to budget 16
6.1. ARE THERE PERCENTAGE LIMITS FOR SPECIFIC COST CATEGORIES, SUCH AS DISSEMINATION OR PERSONNEL COSTS? 16
6.2. IS THE FARM REQUIRED TO PHYSICALLY ATTEND GUARDIANS PROJECT EVENTS OR WORKSHOPS AND SHOULD SOME BUDGET BE SAVED FOR THIS? 16
6.3. HOW IS THE €90,000 TOTAL BUDGET DISTRIBUTED, AND WHAT DOES THE €10,000 MAXIMUM PER FARM REFER TO? 16
7. Questions raised during the Open Call: Questions related to technologies 17
7.1. WHERE CAN I FIND DETAILED INFORMATION ON A SPECIFIC TECHNOLOGY? 17
7.2. CAN A FARM APPLY TO TEST A TECHNOLOGY THAT IS NOT PART OF THE GUARDIANS PROJECT OR THE CO-CREATION OPEN CALL? 17
7.3. IS HISTORICAL DATA FROM PREVIOUS SEASONS ACCEPTABLE, OR IS LIVE OPERATIONAL DATA REQUIRED DURING THE PILOT? 17

Funded by the European Union under the Horizon Europe Framework Programme, Grant Agreement No. 101084468.

1. General Questions related to GUARDIANS project

1.1. What organisations take part in the GUARDIANS project?

The **GUARDIANS'** project is coordinated by **Fundación CTIC** and involves 21 partners from 8 countries. For more information about the participating organisations, please visit the GUARDIANS website.

GUARDIANS aims to empower small - and medium - sized farms through smart solutions, bridging the technological gap with larger food producers.

GUARDIANS will put in place a set of cost-effective and human-centric digital solutions, which aim to support and empower the penetration, sustainability and resilience of more agroecological farming models, like regenerative agriculture, natural grazing, alternative managed grazing strategies, and the promotion of pollinators in different farm structures. Following a multi-actor co-creation methodology, 9 different technologies, combining software and hardware, will be customized to cover the farmers' needs.

1.2. Where can I find more information about the project?

More information about GUARDIANS is available in the following links:

- Project description on EC Portal: https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101084468/en
- Main project website: https://guardians-project.eu/
- Test Before Invest Open Call microsite: https://guardians-project.eu/call/open-call-2-test-before-invest/

Funded by the European Union under the Horizon Europe Framework Programme, Grant Agreement No. 101084468.

2. Questions related to the Open Call

2.1. Who can apply?

For this Open Call only **small or medium-sized farms** are eligible to apply (See Annex A of the GfA).

Please note the following eligibility conditions:

- The farm must provide a valid VAT number at the time of Sub-Grant Agreement preparation. Failure to provide a valid VAT number will automatically result in exclusion from the Sub-Grant Agreement preparation process.
- **GUARDIANS Consortium partners**, and their affiliated entities (Horizon Europe definition) are not eligible. However, for those beneficiaries that are cooperatives with "members" then regular members that do not receive financial compensation (e.g., employees) or hold decision making power (e.g. serving on the board of directors) from the Cooperatives involved in GUARDIANS are eligible to apply.
- **Entities under liquidation, classified as 'in difficulty' according to EU regulations, excluded from EU funding, or subject to national bankruptcy laws are not eligible to apply. Entities are considered to be 'in difficulty' in accordance with Article 2, item 18, points a) and b) of Directive 2013/34/EU.**

2.2. What countries are eligible?

We are looking for entities legally registered at the time of application submission to this Test Before Invest Open Call in one of the following countries:

- The Member States of the European Union and its Overseas Countries and Territories (OCT)
- Associated Countries (AC) to Horizon Europe. Association to Horizon Europe is governed by the Horizon Europe Regulation 2021/695.

The applicants who are subject to EU restrictive measures under Article 29 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) and article 215 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU) are not eligible to participate in this Open Call.

2.3. How do I submit my application?

Your application needs to be **submitted through this form, also** linked on the Test-Before-Invest Open Call landing page. Proposals submitted by other means are not eligible and will not be considered for evaluation.

Funded by the European Union under the Horizon Europe Framework Programme, Grant Agreement No. 101084468.

2.4. Can one applicant submit two applications?

Each farm may **submit only one application**. If a farm appears in multiple submitted proposals, only the last submitted proposal will be considered for evaluation.

2.5. What happens if I do not submit my application within the deadline?

We cannot accept applications after the deadline. We strongly recommend submitting your proposal well in advance to avoid any last-minute issues. Any submission received after the deadline, including due to extenuating circumstances and force majeure, will be automatically rejected. Please ensure that all sections are completed and remember to click the "Submit" button at the end of the online form to finalize your submission.

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

No, you cannot modify your proposal after submission. If you need to change something, you would need to submit another application. In that case, only the last submitted proposal will be considered for evaluation.
However, once the deadline has passed, no new submissions will be accepted.

2.7. Can I apply if I have received FSTP grants from other projects before?

Yes, it is possible to apply if you have received funding from other EU projects before. However, costs for the same activity cannot be funded twice from the EU budget. You cannot receive funding for the same project more than once.
If you are selected for multiple EU projects, you must ensure compliance with the “no double funding” rule. This means that the same costs for the same activity cannot be funded twice through public funds. You will need to confirm that any funding you received from other EU projects does not cover the same costs or tasks that are being funded through the GUARDIANS project.

2.8. Can GUARDIANS consortium members apply to this call?

No, Project partners engaged in the GUARDIANS consortium cannot directly or indirectly intervene in the writing of the applicant proposals.

Funded by the European Union under the Horizon Europe Framework Programme, Grant Agreement No. 101084468.

2.9. Can farms that have collaborated with the GUARDIANS project apply to this call?

Yes, farms that have previously collaborated with the GUARDIANS project are eligible to apply. Although they may have been involved in different project activities, they have not received any associated funding.
To guarantee equal opportunities for all applicants, whether they have collaborated before or not, these farms will not participate in any way in the evaluation or design of this Open Call.

2.10. Can project partners help me with the proposal writing?

No, project partners involved in the GUARDIANS consortium cannot directly or indirectly participate in the preparation of applicant proposals.

2.11. What is a Conflict of Interest (COI)?

A conflict of interest (CoI) arises when personal, financial, political, or other interests compromise, or appear to compromise, the impartial and objective implementation of a project. This may include, but is not limited to, economic interests, political or national affiliations, family or emotional ties, or any other shared interests that could influence decision-making.
In the GUARDIANS project, applicants must not be affiliated with any consortium partners, except for the farms that are members of the partner cooperatives in the project. Applicants may also not be employees of any consortium partner. Additionally, the partner cooperatives involved in the GUARDIANS project will not participate in the evaluation or selection of applicants at any stage, ensuring impartiality and fairness in the process.
To reinforce this principle, all consortium partners – including the cooperatives – have been required to sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA). This ensures that affiliated farms do not have access to any exclusive or non-public information.
All potential conflicts of interest will be assessed individually, and each case will be treated separately, taking into account its specific circumstances. Beneficiaries are required to promptly notify the GUARDIANS Consortium of any situation that may constitute or lead to a conflict of interest, and must take immediate action to resolve the issue. The consortium reserves the right to verify corrective measures and may request further actions within a specified deadline.
If a beneficiary fails to meet these obligations, the Sub-Grant Agreement may be automatically terminated, and the GUARDIANS Consortium reserves the right to suspend further payments and demand the full refund of any payments made to the beneficiary up to that point.

Funded by the European Union under the Horizon Europe Framework Programme, Grant Agreement No. 101084468.

3. Questions related to the evaluation process

3.1. What happens after my application has been submitted?

The applicants will receive a notification from the system confirming that their application has been successfully submitted. If you do not receive this confirmation, please get in touch with us.
Immediately after the submission deadline on **1st July 2026** at **17:00 CEST** (Brussels Time), a First Check will be conducted to verify if applicants meet the eligibility criteria outlined in the 'Guide for Applicants'. For a complete description of the Evaluation Process, please refer to the Guide for Applicants.

3.2. What does my proposal need to meet to be eligible?

To be eligible for the next phase of external evaluation, your proposal must meet the following basic requirements:

1. **Completeness and Readability**: The proposal must be complete, readable, and written in English for all mandatory sections.
2. **Submission Requirements**: It must be submitted via the online form before the deadline **01/07/2026, 17:00 CEST** (Brussels Time).
3. **Type of organization:** The proposal must be submitted by a **small or medium-sized farm**.
4. **Technology selection:** The proposal has selected **one** of the available digital solutions to test.
5. **Required Documents**: All requested annexes and documents must be submitted electronically in the specified formats.

Proposals that do not meet these criteria will be rejected. After this verification, a **"List of Eligible Applications"** will be compiled, and you will be informed of the results within two weeks of the submission deadline. Proposals that pass this eligibility check will proceed to the **external evaluation phase**.

For more information, please refer to Section 4.1 of the **Guide for Applicants**.

3.3. Who are the expert evaluators?

Each eligible proposal will be evaluated by two independent external evaluators, selected from a pool of External Experts. This pool will be composed of external evaluators who respond to an open **Expression of Interest for Evaluators**, which has been previously

Funded by the European Union under the Horizon Europe Framework Programme, Grant Agreement No. 101084468.

launched with the aim of selecting the most suitable independent experts to assess the proposals.
These evaluators will be appointed by the GUARDIANS Consortium based on their relevant expertise in the specific characteristics of the applications.

The external evaluators will receive **evaluation guidelines and templates** and will be duly informed about the timing to ensure a swift and efficient process. All appointed external evaluators will receive the **Code of Conduct** to ensure a trustworthy process and fair competition and will sign **a declaration of no conflicts of interest and a non-disclosure agreement.**

3.4. Who is the Selection Committee?

The **GUARDIANS Selection Committee** is composed of the coordinator (CTIC) and at least two of the **technical partners from the GUARDIANS Consortium** (ITACyL, CARBON, CZU, LINKS, ART21, FLOX, IVL). This committee will review the External Evaluators' ranking list and, by vote (with a minimum 2/3 majority), decide on the **Provisional List of recipients** and the **Reserve List**. Please check Section 4.3 of the Guide for Applicants for further information regarding the Selection Committee.

3.5. What is evaluated in the experts evaluation phase?

Each proposal will be evaluated against the following criteria: usability potential, expected impact and applicability, and capacity.

For each criterion, a set of essential and added values has been established. The essential requirements represent the mandatory requirements that must be fulfilled in order to ensure the feasibility of applying and testing the selected technology on the farm. The added values refer to additional elements that may further enhance the suitability of the farm for the effective implementation, validation and assessment of the technology.

Both the essential and added values conditions are technology-specific. A detailed description of these requirements is provided in the Technology Factsheets document.

Each criterion (usability potential, expected impact and applicability and capacity) will be awarded by a **maximum of 5 points.**

3.6. Are there any extra points?

Yes, extra points may be awarded as follows:

1. **Proposals that select technologies coming from the Co-Creation Open Call will receive 3 extra points.** This is intended to prioritize the replication of these

technologies, ensuring that the solutions developed during the project are tested and replicated in additional farms, while recognizing that other project technologies are already being replicated within the scope of the GUARDIANS project.

2. **Proposals from farms that have previously acted as official use case for any GUARDIANS technology (either from the project or from the Co-Creation Opean Call) will also receive 2 extra points if they apply to replicate a different technology.** This recognizes the added value of farms with prior experience in testing and adopting innovative solutions, as they can provide faster, more effective and reliable implementation and feedback during the replication phase.

The extra points will be added to the final score.

For more information on the scoring and evaluation criteria, please refer to Section 4.2 of the Guide for Applicants.

3.7. How is the final score calculated?

The evaluators will assign a score to each award criterion (usability potential, expected impact and applicability, and capacity) on a scale from 0 to 5, with the exceptional possibility of awarding half-point increments.

The final score will be calculated as an average of the individual assessments provided by the evaluators, plus up to 5 extra point added when applicable, in accordance with the extra criteria.

Therefore, **the maximum total score is 20 points.**

For more information on the scoring and evaluation criteria, please refer to Section 4.2 of the Guide for Applicants.

3.8. What is the minimum score to pass the experts evaluation phase?

The threshold for each individual criterion (usability potential, expected impact and applicability and capacity) is 3 out of 5 points. The overall threshold, which applies to the sum of the three individual scores, is 10 out of 15 points.

Proposals with an overall score below 10 or with any individual criterion score below 3 will not be recommended for funding.

For more information on the scoring and evaluation criteria, please refer to Section 4.2 of the Guide for Applicants.

Funded by the European Union under the Horizon Europe Framework Programme, Grant Agreement No. 101084468.

3.9. How will ties be resolved during the evaluation and selection process?

Ties will be solved using the following the criteria score in the following order:

- Proposals selecting technologies developed under the Co-Creation Open Call
- Proposals selecting a technology that has not been awarded among the rest of the winning proposals, to promote technology variability.
- Proposals submitted by farms that previously acted as an official use case for any GUARDIANS technology.
- Submission date: with earlier submissions taking priority.

Funded by the European Union under the Horizon Europe Framework Programme, Grant Agreement No. 101084468.

4. Questions related to the funding programme

4.1. What is the structure of the funding programme?

Selected farms will participate in a 3-month funding programme, focused on replicating and testing digital technologies developed under the GUARDIANS project or the Co-Creation Open Call.

Farm responsibilities

- **Implement the selected technology** according to the instructions provided by the technology provider. (Milestone 1)
- **Provide feedback and basic KPI data** to the technology provider via short forms or questionnaires. (Milestone 2)
- **Share lessons learned or suggestions** for improving the technology in real-world farm conditions. (Milestone 3)

For more information on the details for the milestones, please refer to Section 5.1 of the Guide for Applicants.

4.2. What is the payment schedule?

Payments will be done **after Milestone's Review (no prefinancing will be allocated)**, following the scheme below:

Phase	Duration	Funding
1 / Implementation and pilot testing	3 months	**Farm** up to €10,000
TOTAL		Up to €10,000

4.3. Should we expect any reviews or audits?

The GUARDIANS Open Call Programme is funded by the European Commission. Therefore, in addition to the standard Milestones Review procedure carried out by the GUARDIANS team, the European Commission may, during the implementation of the project and/or up to 5 years afterwards, conduct checks, reviews, and/or audits to ensure proper implementation and compliance with the obligations outlined in the Agreement and applicable EU regulations.

Funded by the European Union under the Horizon Europe Framework Programme, Grant Agreement No. 101084468.

5. Questions raised during the Open Call: Questions related to eligibility

5.1. Does the applicant need to be an individual farmer, or can a private company (SME) that cultivates land also apply?

The applicant does not need to be a natural person. A private company or SME engaged in agricultural activity may be eligible, provided it qualifies as a small or medium-sized farm (SMF) under the criteria set out in Annex A of the Guide for Applicants. Eligibility is assessed on a case-by-case basis, considering factors such as farm size, standard annual output, number of employees and market orientation. As a general guideline, the farm should not exceed 200 hectares or €500,000 in standard annual output, although exceptions may be considered depending on country-specific context.

5.2. Can small-scale/home greenhouses be considered eligible as small farms or small agricultural sites under this open call?

The Open Call is open to small and medium-sized farms (SMFs). A greenhouse operation is not explicitly excluded from eligibility, provided they are used for real cultivation and meet the SMF criteria described in Annex A of the Guide for Applicants. Eligibility is determined on a case-by-case basis and cannot be confirmed in advance.

5.3. What happens if my country does not issue a VAT number to agricultural holdings, but I hold another official identification number?

The Guide for Applicants requires that all selected applicants provide a valid VAT number or equivalent at the time of Sub-Grant Agreement preparation. Failure to do so results in automatic exclusion from the process.
What is required in any case is that the applicant is officially registered as self-employed or as a legal entity with a valid fiscal identification number recognised by the competent authorities of the country of registration. Where a country's agricultural register issues a specific holding identification number in place of a VAT number (for example, the BPG – Agricultural Holding Number – used in Serbia), this may be considered equivalent for the purposes of the Sub-Grant Agreement.
Applicants in this situation are advised to state their fiscal identification clearly in the application, specifying the official number they hold. Each case will be assessed individually during the formal check. An entity with no official registration or fiscal identifier of any kind cannot be accepted.

Funded by the European Union under the Horizon Europe Framework Programme, Grant Agreement No. 101084468.

5.4. Is Liberia, West Africa, eligible to apply for this call?

Liberia is not eligible to receive financial support under this Open Call. In GUARDIANS, the condition to be eligible to receive financial support under the FSTP scheme is linked to being established in a Member State or in an associated country. Entities established in a non-associated country (even if low- to middle-income country), such as Liberia, are not eligible to receive financial support in the open calls.

5.5. Is Israel eligible to apply for this call?

Israel is an Associated Country to Horizon Europe and is therefore eligible under this Open Call.

Funded by the European Union under the Horizon Europe Framework Programme, Grant Agreement No. 101084468.

6. Questions raised during the Open Call: Questions related to budget

6.1. Are there percentage limits for specific cost categories, such as dissemination or personnel costs?

No. Funding under this Open Call is provided as a 100% lump sum, meaning that actual cost reporting by category is not required. There are no percentage limits established for specific cost categories such as dissemination or direct personnel costs. The grant is disbursed upon successful achievement of the milestones, irrespective of how the budget is internally allocated. Applicants are nonetheless required to submit a budget estimation using the template available on the Open Call microsite for planning purposes.

6.2. Is the farm required to physically attend GUARDIANS project events or workshops and should some budget be saved for this?

No, there is no obligation for selected farms to attend in-person GUARDIANS project events or workshops. Farm responsibilities under the funding programme are limited to three milestones: confirming technology setup (M1), submitting KPI feedback (M2), and sharing lessons learned (M3).

6.3. How is the €90,000 total budget distributed, and what does the €10,000 maximum per farm refer to?

The total budget of the Open Call is €90,000, distributed among up to 9 selected farms, with a maximum of €10,000 per farm. This amount represents the maximum lump-sum funding a single selected farm may receive.

Funded by the European Union under the Horizon Europe Framework Programme, Grant Agreement No. 101084468.

7. Questions raised during the Open Call: Questions related to technologies

7.1. Where can I find detailed information on a specific technology?

Detailed, technology-specific information is provided in the Technology Factsheets document, published on the Open Call microsite. Applicants are strongly encouraged to review the relevant factsheet before preparing their application.

7.2. Can a farm apply to test a technology that is not part of the GUARDIANS project or the Co-Creation Open Call?

No. Eligible activities are strictly limited to the testing, implementation and evaluation of digital/ICT-enabled technologies developed within the GUARDIANS project or through the Co-Creation Open Call. Applicants must select one of the technologies listed in the Technology Factsheets document.

7.3. Is historical data from previous seasons acceptable, or is live operational data required during the pilot?

While historical data may form part of certain technological solutions, the pilot is designed to involve real interaction with live farm data and operations. Applicants are encouraged to ensure that the technology selected, and the timing of the implementation period, allow for genuine real-world testing activity at the farm. If the implementation period does not coincide with the farm's active operational season, applicants should consider selecting a different technology or assessing whether the pilot timing can be aligned with the farm's operational calendar.

Funded by the European Union under the Horizon Europe Framework Programme, Grant Agreement No. 101084468.