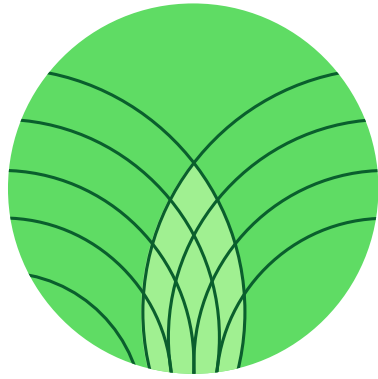




GUARDIANS

Guide for Applicants Test-Before-Invest Open Call

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



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Abbreviations

Acronym	Meaning
EC	European Commission
ESR	Evaluation Summary Report
EU	European Union
GA	Grant Agreement
HE	Horizon Europe
RTO	Research and Technology Organisation
SME	Small and medium-size enterprise
TRL	Technology Readiness Level
VAT	Value Added Tax
SGA	Sub-Grant Agreement
OC	Open Call
SMF	Small and Medium-sized Farm



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1. Introduction

1.1. About GUARDIANS

GUARDIANS (Smart solutions to empower small- and medium-sized farms as guardians of the territory) is a HORIZON EUROPE project funded by the European Commission. It is coordinated by FUNDACION CTIC CENTRO TECNOLÓGICO PARA EL DESARROLLO EN ASTURIAS DE LAS TECNOLOGÍAS DE LA INFORMACIÓN (CTIC), with the participation of [21 partners](#) from 8 countries.

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 farms' needs.

- 1 **Provision of a tailored set of digital innovative solutions.**
- 2 **Demonstration of a multi-actor co-creation methodological framework.**
- 3 **Definition of clear pathways towards sustainable agricultural business models.**
- 4 **Implementation of the one-stop-shop concept under farming cooperatives.**
- 5 **Valorisation of environmental and social impact through blockchain certification.**
- 6 **Fostering a cascading grants mechanism.**

Figure 1 - GUARDIANS' Objectives

1.2. GUARDIANS Open Calls

To reinforce multi-actor collaborations, foster co-creation between research, technical experts and farms, and boost the overall impact of the project, **GUARDIANS** will launch two



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Open Calls. The project aims to attract a substantial number of applications for both calls, expanding its portfolio of technologies, and generating a multiplier effect through real-world use cases.

Table 1 - Open Calls' Funding distribution

Open Call	Co-Creation OC	Test Before Invest OC	TOTAL
N° of projects	Up to 9	Up to 9	
Funding per project	Up to €81,000	Up to €10,000	
Total budget	€729,000	€90,000	€819,000

The first one, the **Co-Creation Open Call**, was launched on May 2025 and selected **9 consortia**, each consisting of one tech provider and one farm, to co-design, develop and test technological solutions. This Open Call had a budget of **€729,000**.

The second one, the **Test Before Invest Open Call**, will select up to **9 farms** to test and validate up to 9 technological solutions. These solutions will be selected from both the 9 technologies developed during the Co-Creation Open Call and those 9 emerging from the project itself, with a budget of **€90,000**. During the execution of the Test Before Invest Open Call, the entity in charge of the technological solution will support the applicant throughout the testing process.

Both open calls are connected as follows: the Test Before Invest Open Call will run in parallel with the final three months of the Co-Creation Open Call. Technologies developed through the Co-Creation Open Call will be made available for testing during the Test Before Invest Open Call (phase 4 – Replication).

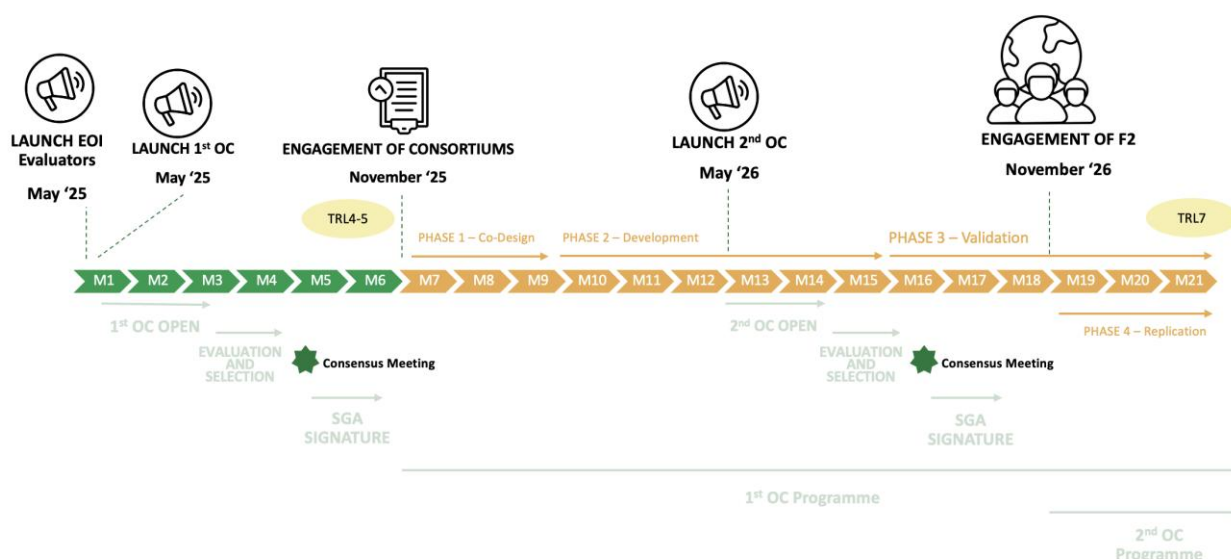


Figure 2 - Open Calls' Process



Where can you find Key information about the Test-Before-Invest Open Call?

- **This Guide for Applicants:** The main document outlining the essential requirements that applicants must meet.
- **Technology Factsheets**: The document that describes detailed information for each technology.
- **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)**: Additional details and clarifications about this Open Call can be found here. The FAQ section will be regularly updated throughout the duration of the Open Call, based on the questions we receive.

Documents supporting the Open Call

- [Annex 1 Financial viability document \(.xlsx format\)](#)
- [Annex 2 Farm declaration \(.pdf format\)](#)
- [Annex 3 Declaration of Honour \(.pdf format\)](#)

Technical support: If you encounter any technical issues or have questions while filling out the online Application Form, please email us at ocguardians@ctic.es.

GUARDIANS will also organize dissemination activities related to this Open Call. These will be announced on the [GUARDIANS Open Call Microsite](#) and through our social media channels ([LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#)).

1.3. Funding scheme

The funding rate of the eligible costs is 100%.

Each selected applicant will receive the funding on a lump sum basis, in compliance with [EC's Guidelines](#) about lump sum grants in Horizon Europe and according to the terms of the sub-grant agreement signed. As such, actual cost reporting is not required and getting the funding will be associated with the achievement of the relevant deliverables (no prefinancing will be allocated).

HOWEVER, the Beneficiary is required to keep all documents relating to its sub-project contract for five years after the end of the GUARDIANS project (planned for 2027) in case the European Commission decides to carry out a financial audit. For more details, see [Section 6.3 - Financial audits and controls](#).

1.4. Means of submission

Submission to the GUARDIANS Test-Before-Invest Open Call will be enabled on the 01/05/2026 at 17:00 CEST (Brussels time) and will conclude on the 01/07/2026 at 17:00 CEST (Brussels time).

- Your application needs to be **submitted through the form** 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.



- You will be able to modify the form until the deadline 01/07/2026 at 17:00 CEST (Brussels Time). However, once the deadline has passed, no further updates or changes to your proposal will be allowed.
- Once you submit the form correctly, the system will send you a confirmation email. If you do not receive it, please contact us. Please note that proposals submitted after the deadline will not be considered for evaluation.

The GUARDIANS Consortium reserves the right to cancel the Open Call at any point due to any unforeseen circumstances. The GUARDIANS Consortium also reserves the right to extend the call and/or launch an additional call, in case not enough proposals of sufficient quality have been received via this first round of the Open Call.

Any communication regarding possible cancellation, extension or launch of additional calls will be made available via the [Open Call Microsite](#).

1.5. Timeline

The table below presents the indicative timeline during which each phase of the GUARDIANS Open Call will take place. The dates may change due to unforeseen events and situations. Therefore, these are an indication of what is initially expected; the dates are to be confirmed by the GUARDIANS team along the process and are not restrictive.

Open Call	From 01/05/2026 to 01/07/2026
Eligibility check	From 02/07/2026 to 09/07/2026
Evaluation of proposals	From 10/07/2026 to 29/07/2026
Consensus meeting	Between 30/07/2026 and 06/08/2026
Communication of results	Between 07/08/2026 and 26/08/2026
Contracting	From 27/08/2026 to 30/09/2026



2. Benefits

The **GUARDIANS** Test-Before-Invest Open Call will select up to 9 farms to replicate technological solutions.

The selected farms will receive a maximum amount of **up to €10,000**.

The total budget of this Open Call is €90,000.

All applicants are required to submit a budget estimation using the excel table available on, the **GUARDIANS** [Test-Before-Invest Open Call Microsite](#).



3. Eligibility criteria

To become a beneficiary of the GUARDIANS Test-Before-Invest Open Call, you must meet all the criteria outlined in Section 3 of this Guide for Applicants, successfully pass the evaluation process described in Section 4, and sign the Sub-Grant Agreement with the GUARDIANS Consortium.

Projects that do not meet all the eligibility criteria will be automatically excluded from the process. We will assess compliance with these criteria throughout the entire evaluation.

3.1. Eligible Applicants

We are looking for **small and medium farms**¹ for the replication of technological solutions. (See Annex A)

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/EU²**

3.2. Eligible Countries

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:

¹ Small or medium-sized farm: Given the lack of a universal, standardized classification system, GUARDIANS has chosen to adopt a multifactorial, case-by-case analysis approach to determine whether a farm qualifies as a small or medium-sized agricultural holding. As a general guideline, farms participating in the GUARDIANS project should not exceed 200 hectares in size or should not have a standard annual output greater than €500,000. However, eligibility will also depend on the specific context and parameters of each country, with exceptions being considered where relevant.

² An enterprise will be considered an undertaking in difficulty if more than half of the capital has disappeared. This refers to the loss of “subscribed share capital”. If profit and loss reserves deficit more than 50% of share capital, there is a potential problem with the company. (Article 2, item 18 point a) and b)) (a) In the case of a limited liability company (other than an SME that has been in existence for less than three years [...]), where



- 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.

3.3. Eligible Activities

The activities eligible for financial support under the GUARDIANS Test-Before-Invest Open Call include the testing, implementation and evaluation of digital/ICT-enabled technologies developed in the context of the GUARDIANS project. This Open Call is exclusively aimed at farms interested in replicating innovative technologies, either from the Co-Creation Open Call or directly developed within the GUARDIANS project.

Selected farms will have the opportunity to test and adopt digital solutions in real-world conditions, providing valuable feedback on usability, performance and impact. Activities may include installation and setup of the technology, data collection, participation in workshops or training sessions provided by the technology provider and reporting results. Farms are expected to collaborate closely with the technology providers to ensure accurate assessment and effective adoption of technology.

3.4. Eligible Applications

Please note that your application needs to fulfil the requirements below to potentially be eligible:

- Your application needs to be **submitted before the deadline** of 01/07/2026 at 17:00 CEST (Brussels Time). Once you submit the form correctly, the system will send you a confirmation email. If you do not receive it, please contact us using the following

more than half of its subscribed share capital has disappeared as a result of accumulated losses. This is the case when the deduction of accumulated losses from reserves (and all other elements generally considered as part of the own funds of the company) leads to a negative cumulative amount that exceeds half of the subscribed share capital. For the purposes of this provision, 'limited liability company' refers in particular to the types of company mentioned in Annex I of Directive 2013/34/EU (1) and 'share capital' includes, where relevant, any share premium. (b) In the case of a company where at least some members have unlimited liability for the debt of the company (other than an SME that has been in existence for less than three years [...]), where more than half of its capital as shown in the company accounts has disappeared as a result of accumulated losses. For the purposes of this provision, 'a company where at least some members have unlimited liability for the debt of the company' refers in particular to the types of company mentioned in Annex II of Directive 2013/34/EU. Please note that, if your SME exists for less than three years, you won't be considered as undertaking any difficulties.



email: ocguardians@ctic.es. Please note that proposals submitted after the deadline will not be considered for evaluation.

- 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.
- Your proposal must be **written in English for all the sections**. If any section is submitted in other language than English, the proposal will be rejected.
- All the requested documents (annexes) must be submitted electronically in the format specified on the application form.
- 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.
- **By submitting your application, you confirm that you have read and accept the terms and conditions outlined in this Guide for Applicants.**



4. Evaluation and Selection

Our evaluation process is transparent, fair and equal to all the participants with a clearly defined complaints procedure (see section 4.5).

Your proposal will be evaluated in multiple phases, as outlined in the figure below. We strongly encourage you to invest the necessary effort to present your proposal as clearly and thoroughly as possible, providing as much detail as you can. This will help us assess your application effectively and determine how well your proposal aligns with the overall objectives of GUARDIANS.

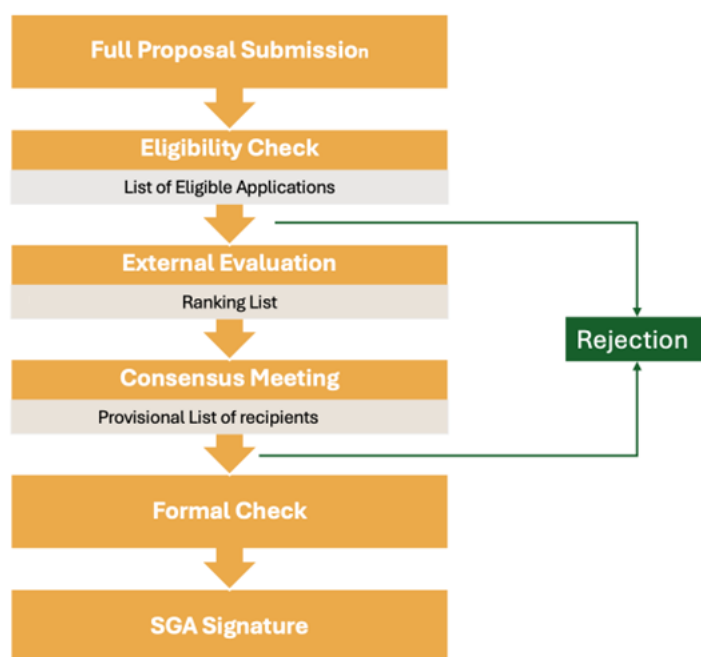


Figure 3 – Test-Before-Invest Open Call Evaluation Procedure

4.1. STEP 1: Eligibility check

The first evaluation step focuses on verifying the basic requirements based on the information provided in your proposal. Your proposal will be eligible for the next phase if it:

- Is **complete, readable** and written in **English** for all mandatory sections.
- Has been submitted via the [online form](#) within the **deadline** 01/07/2026, 17:00 CEST (Brussels Time). In the case that the farm submits multiple forms, only the most recent will be considered.
- Is submitted by a **farm**.
- Has selected **one** of the available digital solutions to test. (See more information below in section “Technology selection”).



- All the requested documents (annexes) have been submitted electronically in the format specified on the application form and following the provided template.
- Farms that have collaborated with the Guardians project (either in the course of the project or in the Co-Creation Open Call) can be eligible for this open call. They won't be part in any form in the evaluation and definition of this Open Call.

Proposals that do not meet these criteria will be rejected. After this verification, a "List of Eligible Applications" will be compiled. We will inform you of the results of this first eligibility check within two weeks following the submission deadline.

Technology selection

Each eligible proposal must indicate one technology that the farm will test and validate. This technology can be selected from the 9 technologies developed during the Co-Creation Open Call or from those 9 emerging from the project itself.

In the [Technology Factsheets document](#), key details of each of the technologies are summarized. Applicants must read carefully all these details to check the alignment between the scope of the technology and their farm. Specifically, for each technology, it is specified:

- Technology description: a concise overview of the technology, including its purpose and main functionality.
- Key features and innovation: the main characteristics and innovative aspects that differentiate the technology from existing solutions.
- Benefits: the expected advantages and added value for the farm, including productivity, sustainability, or efficiency gains.
- Accessibility: how the farmer can access, use, and interact with the technology in practice.

It has to be noted that due to technical and economic constraints, each of the technology providers cannot provide the needed support for more than 2 farms during this TBI Open Call process. Therefore, during the last step of the evaluation process (STEP 3: Consensus meeting), if the number of pre-selected beneficiaries for the same technology provider is more than two, only the two applicants with the higher score will be accepted.

4.2. STEP 2: External evaluation

Only proposals that meet all mandatory requirements in Step 1 will be considered in this external evaluation phase.

In this phase, each eligible proposal within the 'List of Eligible Applications' will be evaluated by 2 external and independent evaluators, appointed according to the specific characteristics of the applications from the pool of External Experts. This pool will be composed of external evaluators who respond to an open Expression of Interest for Evaluators, which will be launched with the aim of selecting the most suitable independent experts to assess the proposals.



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**.

Criteria

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.

Table 2 – Test-Before-Invest Open Call Evaluation Criteria

Criterion	Description
1. Usability Potential	- In this criterion, applicants must demonstrate the potential use of the selected GUARDIANS digital technology on their farm. Essentials: minimum requirements needed to ensure that the technology can be used and tested in practice. Added values: additional elements that may improve the quality of the user experience, the ease of adoption and the value of the feedback collected during the pilot.
2. Expected Impact and Applicability	- In this criterion, applicants must highlight how their farm will benefit from GUARDIANS funding and support, as well as the expected impact that utilising the selected GUARDIANS digital solution should bring to their farm. The accurate description of expected impact is vital, as the comparison of the expected impact and the impact achieved will serve as means of validation of the digital solution in the applicants' validation report at the end of their project. Essentials: minimum elements needed to ensure that the technology is applicable and that its effects can be meaningfully assessed. Added values: additional aspects that may increase the expected benefits of the pilot, the relevance of the results and their potential value for wider replication.
3. Capacity	- In this criterion, applicants must demonstrate that they have the operational capacity to apply the selected digital solution in their farm Essentials: minimum requirements needed to host, support and complete the testing activities. Added values: additional elements that may strengthen the implementation of the pilot, facilitate collaboration with the technology provider and improve the overall quality of the testing process.



Key Considerations for Evaluation

The evaluators will assign a score to each award criterion on a scale from 0 to 5, with the exceptional possibility of awarding half-point increments. For each criterion, the score will be based on the following rationale:

Table 3 – Test-Before-Invest Open Call Rationale Score

Score	Rationale
0 / FAIL	Proposal doesn't meet all of the essentials specified for the chosen technology.
1 / POOR	The proposal fails to justify a significant part of the essentials or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information.
2 / FAIR	The proposal doesn't meet at least one of the essentials for the chosen technology.
3 / GOOD	The proposal addresses all of the essentials specified but the added values are not met.
4 / VERY GOOD	The proposal addresses all of the essentials specified and the added values are broadly met, but the justification could be improved.
5 / EXCELLENT	The proposal addresses all of the essentials specified and addresses all relevant aspects of the added values. Any shortcomings are minor.

Extra points

In addition to the evaluation criteria described above, extra points may be awarded as follows:

- 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.
- Proposals from farms that have previously acted as official use case for any GUARDIANS technology (either from the project or from the Co-Creation Open 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.

Final Score

Each evaluator will produce an Individual **Evaluation Report**. Once the Individual Evaluation Reports are submitted, if the scores of the two evaluators differ significantly (by



2 or more points in two or more criteria), a third external evaluator will be brought in to review the proposal, taking into account the scores from the two evaluators that are more aligned.

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 outlined above.

The threshold for each individual criterion 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. The maximum total score is 20 points. Proposals with an overall score below 10 or with any individual criterion score below 3 will not be recommended for funding.

Ties will be solved using the score of the following criteria 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.

A '**Ranking List**' will be created and all applications that score above the threshold will proceed to the next step.

Please note that the evaluation phase takes time, as it involves a more personalized, qualitative, and non-automated approach.

4.3. STEP 3: Consensus Meeting

Based on the scores provided by external evaluators, a preliminary Ranking List of proposals will be created. This list will then be reviewed and validated by the Selection Committee, which will include the project coordinator (CTIC) and at least two GUARDIANS partners acting as technology providers (ITACyL, CARBON, CZU, LINKS, ART21, FLOX, IVL).

The Selection Committee will meet to assess the feasibility of each proposed application, ensuring alignment with the scope and objectives of the GUARDIANS project. While most proposals are expected to meet these criteria, having already passed the external evaluation, technology providers bring additional insight into identify potential concerns.

The evaluation procedure will follow these main steps:

- Each proposal will be assessed for alignment with the GUARDIANS project.
- Committee members will vote:
 - Yes, if they agree with the external evaluation.
 - No, if they identify any issues. In such cases, the member must provide a justification, which will be documented in a report.



- Any partner with a potential conflict of interest related to a proposal must abstain from taking part in the discussion on that particular proposal and from voting. Specifically, a conflict of interest may arise when the proposal aims to validate a digital solution for which the partner is responsible.

A proposal will be considered selected if at least two-thirds (2/3) of the votes are positive. Otherwise, it will be rejected and the next proposal on the ranking list will be evaluated. This process will continue until up to nine proposals are selected. However, the final number approved for funding will depend on the overall quality of the applications.

If a top-ranked proposal is rejected, the next highest-ranked eligible proposal will be considered.

Please note that, although proposals with the highest scores are generally selected, the Selection Committee may exclude a proposal for justified reasons, such as:

- Misalignment with GUARDIANS' goals and scope.
- Limited potential for impactful results.
- Potential commercial competition.
- Significant ethical concerns.
- Inadequate team credentials.
- Conflicts of interest between applicants and GUARDIANS consortium partners.
- Concerns about the real capacity of the farm to implement the digital solution in time.
- Serious doubts of the technical implementation feasibility due to the declared farm characteristics.
- Difficulty of implementation due to high number of winning proposals choosing the same technology provider, which hinders the capability of a successful implementation in the 3-month period.

Following the Consensus Meeting, the results will be communicated to all applicants.

4.4. Final selection and communication

Following the processes described in the previous steps, up to 9 proposals will be included in the "Provisional List of Beneficiaries" and will proceed to the formal check and Sub-grant Agreement preparation phase.

In addition, a Reserve List may be established. Proposals included in this list may be considered for funding in case:

- Selected applicants withdraw
- Additional funds become available

In the event that an insufficient number of eligible proposals is received or if proposals do not meet the minimum requirements, the final number of funded proposals may be reduced accordingly.



Should additional funds become available (for example, from previous Open Call), additional proposals from this Open Call may be funded, strictly following the same evaluation, ranking and prioritisation criteria described in this Guide for Applicants.

Communication of results

All applicants will receive an **'Evaluation Summary Report'**, which will include individual scores for each criterion. In cases where an applicant is rejected by the Selection Committee, the report will also include the Selection Committee's justification and comments regarding the decision.

4.5. Complaints Process

If, after receiving the eligibility check results, you believe an error has led to the rejection of your application, you have the right to submit a complaint.

Complaints should be sent via email in English to: ocguardians@ctic.es, and must include:

- Submission by the entity's legal representative who also submitted the proposal
- Contact details (including email address)
- A clear description of the complaint in English
- Relevant supporting information and evidence regarding the alleged error

Complaints must be submitted within 3 calendar days, starting the day after the communication was sent. We will review it within 7 calendar days. If additional time is required, we will notify you by email. Anonymous or incomplete complaints will not be reviewed.

Please note that the evaluation is carried out by experts in the relevant field. Complaints will only be considered if related to procedural or technical errors, not the evaluation results themselves.

4.6. Formal Check and Sub-Grant Agreement Preparation

Before selected farms can start testing the technologies under this Open Call, they will be required to sign a Sub-Grant Agreement with the GUARDIANS Consortium.

Prior to signing the Sub-Grant Agreement, applicants must provide documents demonstrating their legal status and eligibility. The GUARDIANS open call manager (CTIC) will verify these documents to confirm compliance.

Each participating farm must provide a valid VAT number at the time of Sub-Grant Agreement preparation. Failure to provide a VAT number will result in exclusion from the Sub-Grant Agreement preparation and corresponding slot may be offered to a farm in the Reserve List.



Find below the required documents for the Sub-Grant Agreement preparation:

Requirement	Description
Proof of Legal Existence	Official document per country showing the farm's name, legal address, registration number and proof of VAT registration (if not included in the registration extract)
Bank Account information	The account where the funds will be transferred will be indicated via a specific form signed by the farm's legal representative and the bank owners.
Sub-Grant Agreement	Signed between the GUARDIANS Consortium, represented by its coordinator (CTIC) and the beneficiary. The Sub-Grant Agreement will also reflect the approved participation in the testing of the selected technology.

Be extremely vigilant regarding:

- **The nature of the documents requested:** If the documents you provide do not prove your eligibility, your participation will be terminated at this stage.
- **The deadlines for document submission:** If the requested documents are not submitted on time, and without a clear and reasonable justification, the applicant will be excluded from further formal check. In this case, another applicant from the 'Reserve List' will be selected.

The signed agreement will follow the rules set in the Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement Art 9.4 "Recipients of financial support to third parties"³

³ https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/agr-contr/general-mga_horizon-euratome_en.pdf



5. Funding Programme Overview

5.1. Implementation and Reporting

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)

5.2. Milestones and KPIs

Even though the farm's tasks are simplified, clear milestones and KPIS ensure proper monitoring and allow the **Milestone Review** to determine the payments.

Milestone	Description	Responsible	KPIs/Indicators
M1: Technology setup	Confirm that the selected technology is installed and operational on the farm	Farm (with provider support)	Installation confirmed (Yes/No); basic functionality check completed.
M2: KPI Feedback submission	Submit short KPI form and operation data	Farm	KPI form submitted on time; completeness of data; adoption of technology in farm tasks.
M3: Lessons learnt	Provide qualitative feedback, suggestions or issues encountered	Farm	Feedback submitted; clarity and usefulness of insights



5.3. Monitoring and Review

The open call manager (CTIC) oversees administrative tasks, milestone verification and compliance, while the Selection Committee conducts a technical review of the implementation. In order to mitigate a potential conflict of interest, the members of the Selection Committee that are responsible for a digital solution that is being reviewed, will not take part in the review process of the given proposal.

Milestones include installation confirmation, submission of KPIs forms and qualitative feedback, with a reporting following the GUARDIANS methodology to ensure consistency and comparability across farms and technologies.

Milestone Review

Performance is evaluated against the following performance criteria:

- KPIs Completion (45%)
- Feedback quality and completeness (45%)
- Deadline Compliance (10%)

Each criterion will be scored on a scale from 0 to 10. The final score will be calculated based on the weighted value of each criterion.

Farms who achieve a final score above the threshold of 7 points will successfully receive the full lump sum. If the final score is below the threshold, beneficiaries will be invited to exit the programme without receiving the corresponding payment.

The Selection Committee will carefully consider cases that fall below the threshold, taking into account any objective reasons for underperformance, such as external factors. **The final decision regarding the approval of payments or the invitation to exit the programme will rest with the GUARDIANS Selection Committee.**

5.4. Payment Arrangements

Funding is lump-sum based, up to €10.000 per farm, disbursed upon successful completion of the milestones. While farms do not produced full deliverables themselves, they are responsible for providing the required KPI forms, installation confirmation and qualitative feedback. The technology provider compiles these contributions into the deliverables that are reviewed by the Selection Committee. In order to mitigate possible conflict of interest, the members of the Selection Committee will not take part in the evaluation of proposals which would have selected the technologies they developed..



Table 4 - Co-Creation Payment Arrangements

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

No prefinancing will be allocated.

Timely submission of milestone contributions is required; failure to do so may result in withholding of the payment.

Farms must retain documentation required by fiscal regulations, even under the lump sum scheme.



6. Beneficiaries Responsibility

The selected Beneficiaries are recipients of European Commission funding. As such, they are responsible for the proper use of these funds and must comply with the obligations as described in Horizon Europe - the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2021-2027). The applicable obligations for the beneficiaries include, but are not limited to, the following:

6.1. Conflict of Interest

The Beneficiaries must take all necessary measures to prevent any situation that could comprise the impartial and objective implementation of the project due to economic interests, political or national affiliations, family or emotional ties, or any other shared interests (conflict of interest, Col). Additionally, applicants must not be affiliated to consortium partners, with the exception of the farms that are part of the partner cooperatives in the GUARDIANS Project. Applicants may not be employees of any consortium partner either. It is important to note that the partner cooperatives in the GUARDIANS Project will not be involved in the evaluation or selection of applicants at any stage of the process, ensuring impartiality and fairness in the decision-making. To reinforce this principle, all consortium partners — including the cooperatives — will be required to sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA). This will ensure that affiliated farms do not have access to any exclusive or non-public information.

All potential conflicts of interest will be carefully assessed on an individual basis. Each case will be treated separately, considering its specific circumstances. For more information, please refer to the details [here](#).

The beneficiaries are required to promptly notify the GUARDIANS Consortium of any situation that constitutes, or may lead to, a conflict of interest. They must take immediate action to resolve the situation. The GUARDIANS Consortium reserves the right to verify that the corrective measures are appropriate and may request additional actions to be taken within a specified deadline.

If any beneficiary fails to meet these obligations, the Sub-Grant Agreement may be terminated automatically. Furthermore, in the event of termination due to a breach by the beneficiary, the GUARDIANS Consortium reserves the right to suspend further payments and demand the full refund of all payments made to the beneficiary until the date.

6.2. Data Protection, Confidentiality & Ethics

Data protection

The personal data collected in GUARDIANS Open Call are processed confidentially pursuant to the provisions of Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016, on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data (General Data



Protection Regulations) and the provisions of the Organic Law 3/2018, of 5 December, on Personal Data Protection and digital rights guarantee.

Confidentiality

The parties must maintain the confidentiality of any data, documents or other material identified as confidential at the time of signing the Sub-Grant Agreement, during the implementation of the project and for five years after its conclusion.

If a beneficiary request it, the Commission and the GUARDIANS Consortium may agree to extend the confidentiality period beyond the initial five years. This extension will be explicitly stated in the Sub-Grant Agreement.

Unless otherwise agreed by the parties, confidential information may only be used for the purpose of implementing the Agreement.

Applicants may disclose confidential information to the GUARDIANS Consortium, who will be bound by a specific Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA)

Additionally, all parties are encouraged to implement robust data security measures to protect confidential information from unauthorized access or breaches. In case of any data breach or violation of confidentiality, applicants must notify the GUARDIANS Consortium immediately and take appropriate remedial actions in accordance with applicable laws.

Ethics

Participating farms are required to follow the ethical and data protection guidelines provided by the technology provider during the implementation of the pilot. The responsibility for compliance with EU ethical rules, data protection and privacy rests with the technology provider. Farms must ensure that any data collected on-site are handled responsibly and in line with these guidelines

6.3. Financial Audit and Controls

The European Commission (EC) will monitor compliance with the financial support conditions outlined in the GUARDIANS Grant Agreement by beneficiaries and third parties. The EC may conduct financial audits, which can be carried out by external auditors or by EC services, including the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF). Beneficiaries are required to provide all relevant information and data to the EC or any authorized representative for audit purposes. The beneficiary must retain all project deliverables and documents for a period of up to five years after the end of the project.

6.4. IPR and Ownership

Each participating farm retains ownership of the data and results generated during the implementation of the technology at their site. Farms are responsible for ensuring the accuracy and integrity of these data. Parts of the implementation results may be requested



to be made public for GUARDIANS dissemination purposes. Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) over the technology itself remain with the original technology developers.

6.5. Use of technology

Participating farms are responsible for implementing the selected technology according to the guidelines provided by the technology provider. The technology provider retains responsibility for the originality of the solution and any third parties rights. Farms must ensure that they use the technology only as authorized and not infringe any third-party rights during implementation.

6.6. Liability

The GUARDIANS Consortium and the European Commission cannot be held liable for any acts or omissions of the participating farms regarding the implementation of the selected technologies. Farms are solely responsible for the safe and proper use of the technology at their site.

If the farm causes damage to a third party, including property, crops, equipment or personnel, they will assume full responsibility. The GUARDIANS' Consortium and the technology provider are not liable for such damage. Farms must ensure that their actions during the pilot do not infringe third-party rights or comprise safety.

The technology provider remains responsible for the performance integrity of the technology itself.

6.7. Do No Significant Harm (DNSH)

Participating farms must respect the 'Do No Significant Harm' principle during the implementation of the selected technology. This means that all activities in the farm should be conducted in a manner that does not significantly harm any of the six environmental objectives of the EU Taxonomy Regulation – 2020/852/EU⁴. EU Taxonomy is a science-based classification system for determining whether an (economic) activity can be considered environmentally sustainable.

The Taxonomy Regulation sets out six environmental objectives (as listed in point 23):

1. Climate change mitigation
2. Climate change adaptation
3. The sustainable use and protection of water and marine resources
4. The transition to a circular economy
5. Pollution prevention and control
6. The protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems

⁴ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32020R0852>



Farms should follow the guidance provided by the technology provider and implement the technology according to best environmental practices to ensure compliance with the DNSH principle. Any potential environmental impacts must be minimized and activities should avoid causing significant harm as defined in Article 17 of the Taxonomy Regulation.

6.8. Giving Visibility to the EU Funding

Participating farms must contribute to promoting the GUARDIANS project and its results by sharing information about the implementation and testing of the selected technology upon request from the GUARDIANS Selection Committee, and by acknowledging the financial support received from the European Union.

Unless otherwise agreed by the European Commission or the GUARDIANS coordinator, or if impossible, any communication activities, publicity, or promotional material (including social media, brochures, posters, etc.), as well as any infrastructure or major results funded by the grant, must:

1. Display the EU emblem



2. Display the GUARDIANS logo



3. Include following text:

‘Funded by the European Union under Grant Agreement N. 101084468. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or REA. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.’

When displayed in association with a logo, the European emblem should be given appropriate prominence. This obligation to use the European emblem in respect of projects to which the EC contributes implies no right of exclusive use. It is subject to general third-party use restrictions which do not permit the appropriation of the emblem, or of any similar trademark or logo, whether by registration or by any other means. Under these conditions, the Beneficiary is exempted from the obligation to obtain prior permission from the EC to use the emblem. Further detailed information on the EU emblem can be found [here](#).

Any publicity made by the participating farm regarding the testing of the technology, in whatever form and on or by whatever medium, must specify that it reflects only the author's views and that the EC or GUARDIANS Consortium are not liable for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.



7. Contact us

The GUARDIANS Consortium will provide all relevant information to applicants primarily through the official Open Call page. A dedicated **FAQ document** will be available on this page, which will be regularly updated with questions received via email to ensure all potential applicants have equal access to the information.

No binding information will be provided through other channels (e.g., telephone or email). The contact email (ocguardians@ctic.es) may only be used to request general information.

For more information about the GUARDIANS project, visit: <https://guardians-project.eu/>

For details about the GUARDIANS Test-Before-Invest Open Call, please visit: <https://guardians-project.eu/call/open-call-2-test-before-invest/>

To apply, please use the following link: <https://forms.gle/3KrQHeh4W7rX1VYM9>



8. Additional Considerations

Any matters not covered by this Guide for Applicants will be governed by the relevant laws and regulations of the Horizon Europe Programme and the general rules for EU grants.

The GUARDIANS Consortium reserves the right to cancel, modify the terms, or extend the deadline of the Open Call described in this document at any time. In such cases, all applicants will be promptly notified of any changes.

Didn't find what you were looking for? Please check the FAQ document. You can also reach out to us: ocguardians@ctic.es.



9. Annex A. Small and medium-size farms definition

The GUARDIANS project specifically targets small and medium-sized farms (SMFs), with the goal of empowering these farms through the use of smart, cost-effective digital solutions. The project seeks to bridge the technological gap between small and medium-sized farms and larger food producers, supporting the transition towards more sustainable and resilient agroecological farming models. These models include practices such as regenerative agriculture, natural grazing, alternative managed grazing strategies, and pollinator promotion within various farm structures.

Agriculture in the EU is broadly categorized into three types:

1. Subsistence farming, focused on producing food for the farms and their families.
2. Small and medium-sized holdings, often family-run businesses.
3. Large agricultural enterprises.

Eurostat⁵ does not provide a specific classification for small and medium-sized farms (SMFs) based on farm size, as there is considerable variation influenced by factors such as country, sector, value chains, and specific products or crops. For example, in France, farms have an average size of 69 hectares, which is relatively large compared to the EU average of 17.4 hectares, while in Slovenia, the average farm size is around 7 hectares.

Eurostat categorizes farms based on their economic size. Small farms are defined as having a Standard Output (SO) between €2,000 and €25,000 and typically covering less than 5 hectares, while medium farms have an SO between €25,000 and €250,000, with a farm size ranging from 5 to 49 hectares. Additionally, the **European Parliamentary Research Service**⁶ employs a hybrid approach, combining farm size with financial output in their statistical analysis.

Given the lack of a universal, standardized classification system (as explained above), GUARDIANS has chosen to adopt a multifactorial, case-by-case analysis approach to determine whether a farm qualifies as a small or medium-sized agricultural holding. Each case will be assessed based on factors such as farm size, income, production quantity, number of employees, ownership status, market power, profit margins, and involvement at different stages of the value chain. This categorization will always consider contextual and country-specific factors.

As a general guideline, farms participating in the GUARDIANS project should not exceed 200 hectares in size or have a standard annual output greater than €500,000. However, eligibility will also depend on the specific context and parameters of each country, with exceptions being considered where relevant.

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Farms_and_farmland_in_the_European_Union_-_statistics

⁶ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/733630/EPRS_BRI\(2022\)733630_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/733630/EPRS_BRI(2022)733630_EN.pdf)



Other criteria that define a small and medium-size farm compared to large farms:

Criteria	Small Farms	Medium Farms	Large farms
Labor Force	Primarily family labor, minimal hired labor.	Mix of family and hired labor, fewer than 10 full-time workers.	There is a sizeable labor force that doesn't own the farm
Production Scale	Diverse and mixed farming practices, including crop production and livestock rearing, aimed primarily at local markets and subsistence.	Higher production capacity may specialize in specific crops or livestock and have access to regional markets.	Focused on monoculture generally looking forward to economy of scale rather than quality and sustainability of the production. The production scale does not consider the territorial base available to the farm, relying on external imports.
Market Orientation	Direct-to-consumer, local markets, community-supported agriculture (CSA) programs.	Larger regional markets, possible contractual agreements with processors/retailers.	Markets at regional/national level with direct selling or retailer contracts.
Resource Management	Traditional and sustainable practices, limited access to advanced technologies and financial resources.	More advanced techniques and technologies, emphasis on sustainability and efficient resource use.	Industrialized means of production, focusing on having an economy of scale and reducing the labour intensity, rather than managing the land in a more natural way.

