



# SmartAgriHubs Open Calls

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Open Calls RESTART & EXPAND

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<b>Topic</b>	<p>Collection of Frequently Asked Questions for the SmartAgriHubs RESTART &amp; EXPAND Open Calls:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>RESTART:</b> Open call for hackathon type of activities that will contribute to the RESTART of the European Agri-Food Economy with short and medium-term impact to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 crisis.</li><li>• <b>EXPAND:</b> Open Call for Digital Innovation Hubs that are supporting the realisation of Innovation Experiments, mobilising the related stakeholders, and facilitating the access to Competence Centre related services</li></ul>

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# 1. General Questions

## 1.1 What is SmartAgriHubs looking for?

SmartAgriHubs is aiming at an expansion of the current networks of regional Digital Innovation Hubs (DIHs) and technology focused Competence Centres (CCs). At the same time, such a network expansion shall go hand in hand with the realisation of so-called Innovation Experiments (IEs). Therefore, the SmartAgriHubs open call is calling for proposals that aim at the realisation of programmes that are promoting digital innovation in form of IEs that are directly supported by DIHs and CCs.

Overall, SmartAgriHubs would like to support an additional amount of some 70 IEs taking place in different European regions. At the same time, SmartAgriHubs would like to trigger local initiatives that consider the offered grant as one part of the required budget and intend to mobilise additional funding from diverse sources as appropriate with the specific situation in the related region.

## 1.2 What is SmartAgriHubs not looking for?

SmartAgriHubs is not searching for technology driven initiatives that would like to focus on validation of a specific technology enabler. Of course, IEs shall also realise digital innovations, but focus rather on the "supported pathway" from end-user needs to a realised digital innovation at an end-user site, than focusing on plain technological development.

## 1.3 What topics can be addressed?

IEs shall realise digital innovation in the agri-food domain. The proposing DIHs shall offer a reasonable service portfolio for being able to facilitate the realisation of IEs. At the same time, CCs need to be involved as experts for specific topics in relation to the digital innovation.

See also at the SmartAgriHubs website <https://www.smartagrihubs.eu/> for more information about DIHs, CCs and IEs.

## 1.4 Who can apply?

Legal entities from EU member states or associated countries. Proposals are expected to be led by DIHs. A preference is given to the participation of small, medium, and micro enterprises (SMEs) established in the EU and associated countries. European SMEs shall follow the definition in the Commission Recommendation 2003/361/EC. An organisation qualifies as an SME if the following thresholds apply:

- Less than 250 employees,
- Annual turnover <50 Mio EUR, and
- Annual balance sheet total <43 Mio EUR.

Those thresholds specifically apply for autonomous enterprises. If other organisations are linked or are partner organisations, the calculation needs to consider those relationships.

Please note that submission retained for funding must come from legal entities established in the European Union; or Switzerland, Israel, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein, Turkey, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia, Albania, Montenegro, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Faroe Islands, Republic of Moldova or UK.

## 1.5 Who can submit a proposal to the open calls?

The RESTART and EXPAND open calls are requesting for proposals submitted by Digital Innovation Hubs (DIH). A DIH (Definition on the SAH website) is rather a role of an organisation than the organisation as a whole entity. Of course, if there is a legal entity/organisation that was founded just with the role of being a DIH, it would also be eligible.

Organisations would also be eligible, if they have different missions as well as represent a role as Competence Centre (CC). However, before submitting a proposal, please register the DIH in the SmartAgriHubs portal and perform an innovation services maturity self-assessment.

## 1.6 How does my organisation qualify as DIH?

DIH(s) submitting a proposal to SmartAgriHubs need to explain their qualification and their offered service portfolio. It is not required to undergo a specific external certification procedure at proposal stage.

DIHs participating in a proposed project, must register in the SmartAgriHubs portal before submitting a proposal (<https://www.smartagrihubs.eu/portal/network>), and DIHs need to perform a DIH innovation services maturity self-assessment, providing the self-assessment results as part of the proposal. This shall help the experts evaluating your proposal to understand if the proposed strategy matches the current and potential future evolution of your organisation's qualification/ DIH innovation services.

Moreover, SmartAgriHubs ask all DIHs selected for funding for a later peer-review by DIHs to also initiate experience exchange and facilitate collaboration in the DIH network.

## 1.7 Who has access to the results of DIH maturity self-assessment?

We see the self-assessment primarily as data private to the DIH, so in principle, the data is available to the DIH members only. Technically, the self-assessment is also programmed and implemented as a separate module.

However, there are three exceptions to this principle that we would like to highlight:

- SmartAgriHubs work package 4 on Digital Innovation Hubs related matters ask you to reveal information under "non-disclosure" for the friendly-peer-reviewing.
- SmartAgriHubs will encourage DIHs to reveal parts of the maturity self-assessment results to the public profile, because this helps to better understand the profile and performance of the DIH. This should help in the matchmaking. We already know that e.g. corporates are demanding such profiling.
- SmartAgriHubs as a project will request access to parts of the self-assessment data, to be able to monitor the progress overall of self-assessments and to identify weak and strong points in the network. This shall enable the overall SmartAgriHubs project to identify requirements of the community and elaborate new directions for e.g. training materials. Also for benchmarking some level of access is clearly needed.

Please note: At the current moment in July 2020, these 3 items are NOT implemented. At this point your data is your data. Upon implementation on any of the three features, we will inform related organisations and ask for the related approvals.

## 1.8 Can a consortium submit a proposal?

The proposals are submitted by one coordinating partner that manages the consortium of partners and in case of selection for funding would sign the sub-grant agreement on behalf of the consortium of partners.

## 1.9 What kind of funding is offered by SmartAgriHubs?

SmartAgriHubs offers sub-grant agreements, providing funding in the scope of the project SmartAgriHubs that received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 818182".

Reimbursement by SmartAgriHubs will be released with respect to delivered results. Projects need to define deliverables, KPIs and related milestones, including how to measure the additional budget to be mobilised. The specific payment plan for reimbursing defined deliverables will be agreed in the contracting phase with the selected proposers.

## 1.10 Are legal entities submitting proposals subject to the rules of the de minimis?

The submitted proposals are funded in the scope of the Horizon 2020 EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. Therefore, the proposers are also asked to fulfil general contractual obligations (see Annex 3 of the Open Call Programme Document) and specifically with respect to the visibility of funding as well as contributing to the validation of the overall innovative approach and methodology elaborated by the SmartAgriHubs project, funded under Grant Agreement 818 182.

Therefore, the de minimis rule takes no effect in this type of funding.

Nevertheless, please consider the following rule as stated in section 6.5.3 of the SmartAgriHubs programme document:

- The proposer states that he/she will NOT request more than EUR 100,000 in total in one or more proposals selected by SmartAgriHubs.

## 1.11 What is the European Dimension of the Open Calls?

The strategic objective of the SmartAgriHubs project is the digitisation of European agriculture by fostering an agricultural innovation ecosystem dedicated to excellence, sustainability, and success. By generating new ideas for innovation experiments by the RESTART open call as well as to develop thorough strategies supporting digital innovation in the different European regions and facilitating collaboration of DIHs, CCs & IEs in the EXPAND open call, a European Community shall be established that is open for all stakeholders helping to access latest knowledge, technologies and experience gained.

## 1.12 How to combine SmartAgriHubs funding with additional public or private funds?

In the RESTART and EXPAND open calls, SmartAgriHubs generally provides a maximum of 20% as funding compared to the overall budget that would be required for the realisation of all the activities planned by a proposal.

## 1.13 What are the key benefits for a proposer/ consortium applying in the Open Call?

Besides a sub-grant provided by SmartAgriHubs that can be used for your proposed activities, you will become member of a European Network of DIHs, CCs and IEs that is covering all 27 member states. In further detail we would like to highlight the following collaboration potentials:

- Existing network of over 140 DIHs, enabling access to SMEs/startups/scale-ups
- Network of Competence Centres offering support in diverse fields of expertise

- Facilitated matchmaking to over 60 Flagship Innovation Experiments, including sub-projects from the EU funded research projects SmartAgriHubs and IoF2020.
- A well-equipped support team that is located in the different European regions with thorough experience in the domain of digital innovation

### **1.14 How do I have to plan the project?**

Your project plan must follow the conditions as published in the Open Call publication document. It is crucial that you are defining a clear strategy, schedule, and properly defined results (i.e. deliverables) that will be elaborated. Please make sure, that SmartAgriHubs will be able to test and validate, if the planned deliverables are satisfactory implemented. This planning and the related list of deliverables will be the main references for reviews and deciding on the reimbursement of costs, based on a lump sum basis.

### **1.15 Can a legal entity apply for two different projects in the same open call?**

There is no limit for the number of proposals you can submit. However, organisations can only receive funding in maximum of two different projects (i.e. sub-grants) funded by SmartAgriHubs in the scope of the open calls.

Moreover, the same work/costs proposed can only be funded by one project supported by SmartAgriHubs and not be presented in or reimbursed by two or more projects that receive funding from SmartAgriHubs. However, this does not exclude collaboration and joint work of different projects, where the costs are individually covered or covered by additional third parties' funding.

### **1.16 What language should the proposal be submitted in?**

Proposals should be submitted in ENGLISH.

### **1.17 How do I proof excellence of my team?**

The short presentation of your organisation shall outline your key competencies and previous experience with respect to relevant fields of expertise. Moreover, you need to provide short CVs of those individuals that will mainly work in your project – please do not put CVs of individuals that are finally not working or just with a minor role in your proposed work. Those CVs (approx. 3-10 lines of text) shall reflect their education and previous experiences that is relevant for the work proposed.

### **1.18 How should the proposal be submitted?**

There will be a proposal management system that shall be used by the coordinating proposer. You need to register and provide some administrative data. The proposal shall be prepared as pdf document and uploaded in the system for evaluation.

### **1.19 What is a continuous submission scheme?**

The RESTART and EXPAND open calls will be opened on Wednesday, July 08<sup>th</sup> 2020 and closed on Wednesday, July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021, 17:00 CEST (Brussels time); or at an earlier date, in case the budget that is reserved for open calls in SmartAgriHubs is completely allocated. If other open calls, with similar or deviating conditions, will be published by SmartAgriHubs, potential proposers can find related information on the SmartAgriHubs website.

Proposals can be submitted for evaluation until closure of the open call and will be evaluated in batches at regular points in time. Dates and time for the evaluation of batches of submitted proposals will be communicated via the SmartAgriHubs website.

## 1.20 How will my proposal be evaluated?

Proposals will be evaluated by experts having thorough experience and are able to assess the quality of the proposals. The evaluators will be experts in the fields of innovation and digitisation, usually with previous experience in the business domain of agri-food. Generally, they shall also have prior experience in evaluating proposals.

Each proposal will be evaluated by three experts. The proposal evaluation will be documented internally, the results are communicated to the representatives of the European Commission and proposers will be informed, if they can be considered for funding.

Proposals will be evaluated and selected based on the Evaluation Criteria. To be considered for funding, your proposal must score above a certain threshold for each criterion, and above an overall threshold as published in the specific open calls. Decisions of the evaluators will be delivered "as-is" and are not subject to further discussions with proposers.

## 1.21 My proposal has been selected for funding, now what?

You will be informed by the SmartAgriHubs team and need to sign a sub-grant agreement. The basic terms and conditions are explained in further detail in the Open Call Programme Document that can be downloaded via the SmartAgriHubs website.

Selected applicants will be requested to present a detailed plan with respect to deliverables, milestones, and associated costs. If needed both parties will enter negotiations to agree upon mutually acceptable plan. In case the negotiations are not concluded in a short period of time (i.e. 2 weeks) the proposal will be not considered eligible.

## 1.22 Who owns the Intellectual Property generated in the scope of the proposed work?

Intellectual Property (IP) shall be the property of the Sub-grantee (or other Project partner) carrying out the work generating that result, unless otherwise agreed between the Project partners.

However, please consider the General Conditions with respect to Intellectual Property Rights, Use and Dissemination that will be part of the sub-grant agreement. These are presented in the Open Call Programme Document.

## 1.23 What must be reported for a reimbursement of costs?

You must present your work results, and a related documentation. The documentation must clearly present the elaborated deliverables in relation to your proposal that becomes the annex to the sub-grant agreement. The results need to be delivered in a way, that the SmartAgriHubs team can review the results. If there is a need to present confidential information SmartAgriHubs will not disclose any intellectual property as far as indicated by your organisation.

## 1.24 Which kind of documents are requested for financial reporting for each of the cost categories in the budget?

SmartAgriHubs will reimburse the delivered results that need to be defined in terms of expected deliverables (e.g. services provided, implemented solution, events, activities), milestones (i.e. timing of results) and KPI (e.g. number of supported parties, realised interactions, attracted additional investors) on a lump sum basis." Therefore, please take the following into account:

- For calculation of costs in the proposal and as input for the negotiation if selected, please use the budget categories as listed in the open call documents. Since as also highlighted in the Annotated Model Grant Agreement of the EC on page 779 "For General Lump Sum grants, the rules on the calculation of the revised final grant amount are in principle the same as in the General MGA (see Article 5.3 H2020 General MGA)."
- The cost reporting with respect to lump sums is not focusing on the financial reporting. It is rather asking you to declare at jointly agreed milestones that you implemented the action as planned. The eligibility condition that must be fulfilled is that the action tasks have been carried out as described in the Annex 1 of the sub-grant agreement prepared during the negotiation phase.
- Please be aware, that for General Lump Sum grants, improper implementation of the action not in accordance with the Annex 1 does NOT lead to a reduction of the grant, but to the ineligibility of the costs. Therefore, if the action is not carried out as described in the Annex 1, costs will be rejected proportionally to the tasks or parts of the action not implemented.

## 1.25 Can a proposer spend any amount of the requested funding on subcontracting?

As mentioned in the programme document: "Subcontractors can also participate, up to a maximum of 10% of the total funding."

- However, we shall possibly also reflect on the reasons for this:
- It would generally not make sense to put large budgets on subcontracting, since in that case the subcontractor could become the contractor.
- Moreover, it might be difficult for an evaluator to evaluate the excellence of the team.
- At the same time, we must also remember the underlying calculation models. Subcontractors are usually asking for a "price" not for "cost reimbursement", where the price might include a certain amount of profit. Therefore, aiming at a large amount of subcontracting would not be a very good practice to assure cost reimbursement and not profit generation by taxpayers' money.

## 1.26 How will the funding be provided?

Depending on the nature of results and envisaged milestones, SmartAgriHubs considers providing an advance payment of 20% from the requested eligible max. funding. The remaining 80% would be reimbursed upon delivery of deliverables and accomplishment of milestones as contractually agreed.

### **1.27 The European Commission or the Research Executive Agency can ask for an audit – what does this mean?**

It is neither explicitly planned, nor predefined, but the European Commission may, at any time during the implementation of the project and up to five years after the end of the project, ask for financial audits or technical checks, reviews, audits and/or investigations to be carried out, by external auditors/ experts, or by the Commission services themselves including OLAF. You need to keep your contractual documents and documentation of results elaborated at the defined milestones and specifically those main milestones that served for the review of being able to decide on the reimbursement of costs.

### **1.28 What happens if I accomplish my project earlier compared to the initial plan?**

You can initiate the review procedure by SmartAgriHubs earlier and update your planning for post project activities. However, due to aspects of efficiency within the overall project, the review might not take place immediately, but tries to group reviews of several accomplished projects. However, you would be informed accordingly.

### **1.29 Is 100% funding possible for a limited liability company that reinvests the profits and not providing them to its shareholders?**

The decision if a company can be considered as a non-profit organisation shall be based on the formal status of the organisation and if the tax authorities are accepting this organisation accordingly. Concerning a company's internal decision to use its profit not as payment for shareholders, but as reinvestment as normal business strategy it usually not represent a non-profit organisation, since the profit can be realised at any later point in time e.g. in an exit when selling company shares.

### **1.30 If the main applicant qualifies for a 70% grant, and another partner for 100% reimbursement of costs, do they receive different %?**

Yes, eligible costs for funding need to be calculated in accordance to the type of partners in the consortium.

### **1.31 Can a DIH be partner in a project if they are already sub-contractor of SmartAgriHubs?**

Organisations that have a sub-contract with a SmartAgriHubs beneficiary are generally eligible, if there are no other links to beneficiaries that could cause a conflict of interest.

### **1.32 Can SmartAgriHubs beneficiaries be subcontracted by a proposed project?**

Generally, SmartAgriHubs is aiming at the involvement of new parties to expand the network and not to expand the work of parties that are already SAH beneficiaries.

However, from a formal perspective, we shall look at page 146 of the "H2020 Programme; AGA – Annotated Model Grant Agreement; Version 5.2 from 26 June 2019" ([https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/grants\\_manual/amga/h2020-](https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/grants_manual/amga/h2020-)

amga\_en.pdf). It is highlighted the following definition for “Subcontractors” as used in Article 13 of the SmartAgriHubs Grant Agreement:

- “Subcontractors — Subcontractors participate in the action by carrying out action tasks for the beneficiary. They are NOT beneficiaries and therefore have no direct obligations under the grant agreement [...].”

Therefore, the answer is “No”. Nevertheless, SmartAgriHubs considers it positive to facilitate collaboration of Digital Innovation Hubs and Competence Centres involved as beneficiaries in SmartAgriHubs with new Digital Innovation Hubs submitting a proposal. Therefore, we added the following statement in the Open Call Programme Document:

- The current SmartAgriHubs beneficiaries (i.e. specifically DIHs and CCs) will however be able to support the proposed project with up to 10% of the funding requested in the proposal. If you expect an added value by an involvement of a SmartAgriHubs beneficiary, please explain this in your proposal. This shall be generally agreed with the related SmartAgriHubs beneficiary before submitting your proposal. The following minimum explanation is required:
  - Envisaged type and purpose of involvement of current SmartAgriHubs partner(s)
  - Expected amount of effort required
  - Type of results and experiences that shall be used from one of the current FIEs, also explaining how it would be (commercially) used
  - Number of meetings, trips or other activities required by existing partners

This support would be realised according to Article 4.2 of the SmartAgriHubs Grant Agreement. However, this possibility is rather considered useful for the EXPAND the NETWORK open call. But please discuss this with the specific DIH. If they consider that there would be a need for a budget transfer, they shall contact the project coordinator and we will finally review all those requests with the “SmartAgriHubs Strategic Guidance Board”.

Of course, it needs to be made sure to prevent any situation where the impartial and objective implementation of the action is compromised for reasons involving economic interest, political or national affinity, family or emotional ties or any other shared interest (‘conflict of interests’).

### 1.33 Is there an expected size of Hackathons, Datathons or Challenges?

We did not define a specific size for the hackathon type of activities (e.g. hackathon, datathon, challenges). Since evaluating the impact of those activities just by looking at the size as one criterion could be misleading.

We think that the overall concept and strategy matters. Since we assume that many criteria will influence the potential impact of proposed activities. Therefore, it might even be more interesting to think about the potential output that those activities could generate to achieve the strategic objectives of the open call.

### 1.34 I have another question not yet answered in this FAQ document, whom to ask?

If you have any additional/other questions regarding the Open Call, you can also look at the [SmartAgriHubs Forum's Open Call category](#). If your question is also not yet answered there, please create a new topic in the Open Call category. The SmartAgriHubs Open Call team will regularly answer the questions.

Moreover, the SmartAgriHubs team will update this document regularly with answered questions from the SmartAgriHubs Forum as well as discussed at events, webinars or individually raised.

### **1.35 How can I access the SmartAgriHubs Forum to ask additional questions?**

For being able to ask a question in the SmartAgriHubs Forum, you need to register in the SmartAgriHubs Portal. This registration is done in some minutes, without any costs or contractual obligations. On top of that, it offers access to additional material and information like:

- Training material,
- Library with diverse expertise offered by the SAH community,
- Map with the members of the SmartAgriHubs Community Network, enabling to find potential partners for digital innovation related activities as well as enabling you to add your organisation,
- Calendar listing the latest online and offline events, and
- Forum to offer an interactive place to get in touch with the larger community network having an interest in Digital Innovation

## **2. Disclaimer**

The information in this document is provided "as is" at the time of preparation. The specific open call announcement documents will specify the details to be considered for proposal preparation. Therefore, the terms set out in the Call Open Call documents shall take precedence over those in this document.

Especially with respect to potential future open calls (i.e. not yet published) the user thereof uses the information at its sole risk and liability.