

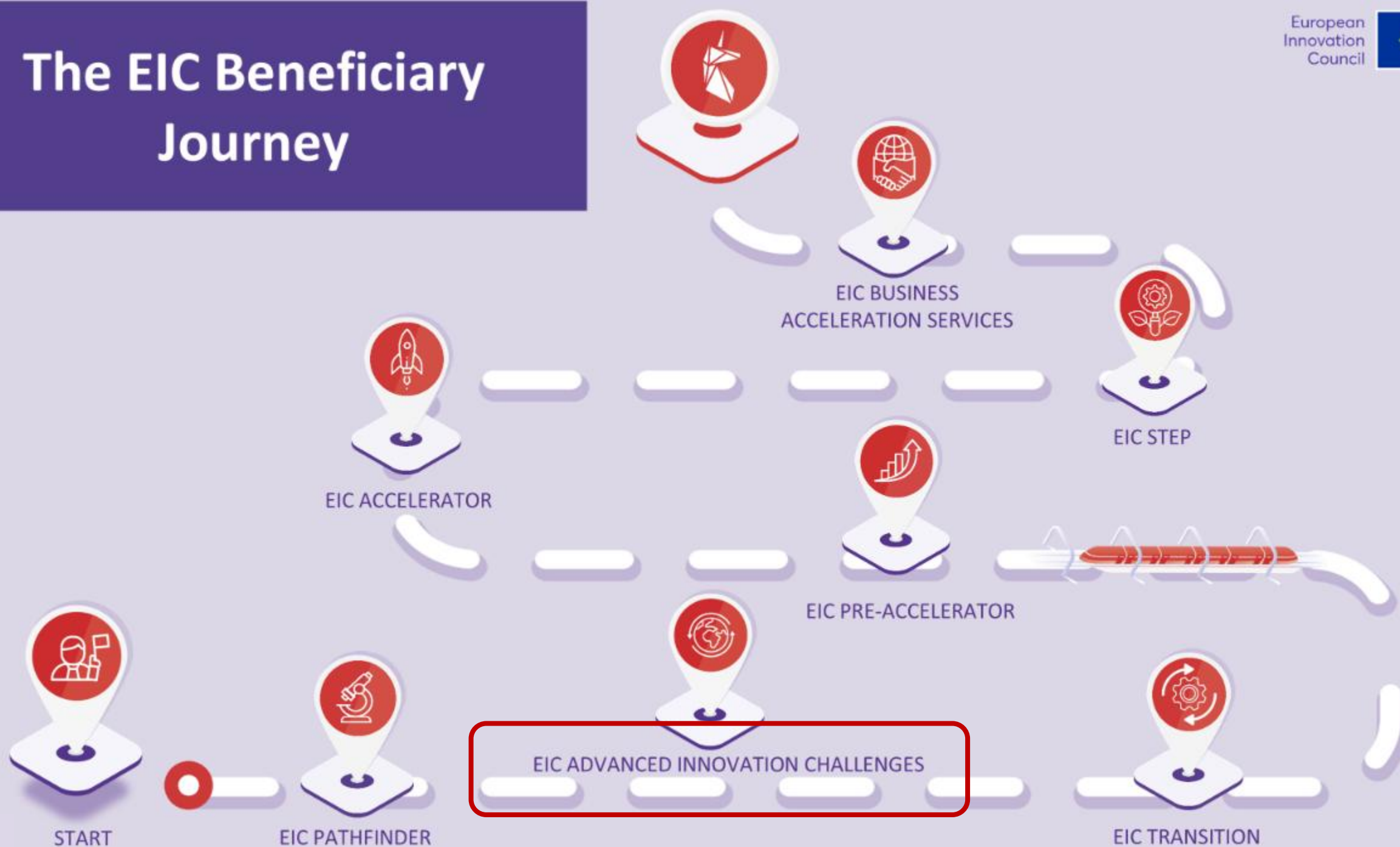
European
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EIC Work Programme 2026

EIC Advanced Innovation Challenges

The EIC Beneficiary Journey



Breakdown of main calls



NEW SCHEME

EIC ADVANCED INNOVATION CHALLENGES

To support high-risk, demand-driven deep tech innovation with transformative potential especially in areas where there is extensive research but lack of commercial uptake.

2026

€6m

26.02.2026

2027

€25m

18.06.2027

- First stage grants up to €0.3m
- Larger grants up to €2.5m

AIC calls 2026 – Summary table



	AIC
Total budget	€6 million
Proposals (indicative)	Stage 1: €300.000 Stage 2: up to €2.5 million
Funding rate	100% of eligible costs
Opening	03 December 2025
Deadline	Stage 1: 26 February 2026 at 17.00 CEST Stage 2: 18 June 2027 at 17.00 CEST
Length of proposal	Stage 1: 11-page proposal (part B) Stage 1: 22-page proposal (part B)

EIC Advance Innovation Challenges (AIC)



Why AIC?

Reinforce the risk taking

User uptake of innovations

Test (D)ARPA approach

Increase the role of PMs

Who can apply?

Stage1: any solution with a right TRL level in the domain of the challenge

Stage 2: Restricted to stage1 projects

Single entity (Stage1) or small consortia ≤ 3 (stage2)

What support?

6M€ for Stage1 and 25M€ for Stage2

€300K LS type1 for Stage1

Apply till **26/02/2026** 5PM

Grant: €2.5M for Stage2

Proactive portfolio management

Why Advance Innovation Challenges (AIC)



- Draghi Report: Support for breakthrough disruptive innovation remains limited. → Increase support to disruptive innovation, through an 'ARPA-type' agency;
- EIC Board recommendation aimed at strengthening Europe's position as a leader in deep tech innovation. → Embrace support for high risk, high impact deep tech innovations by introducing ARPA style operations and capabilities.
- Heitor report: ARPA-like programmes are missing within the Horizon Europe Programme. → EIC Board and agency should immediately consider the expert report of 2020.
- Conclusion is clear for EIC: reinforce the risk taking and user uptake of innovations



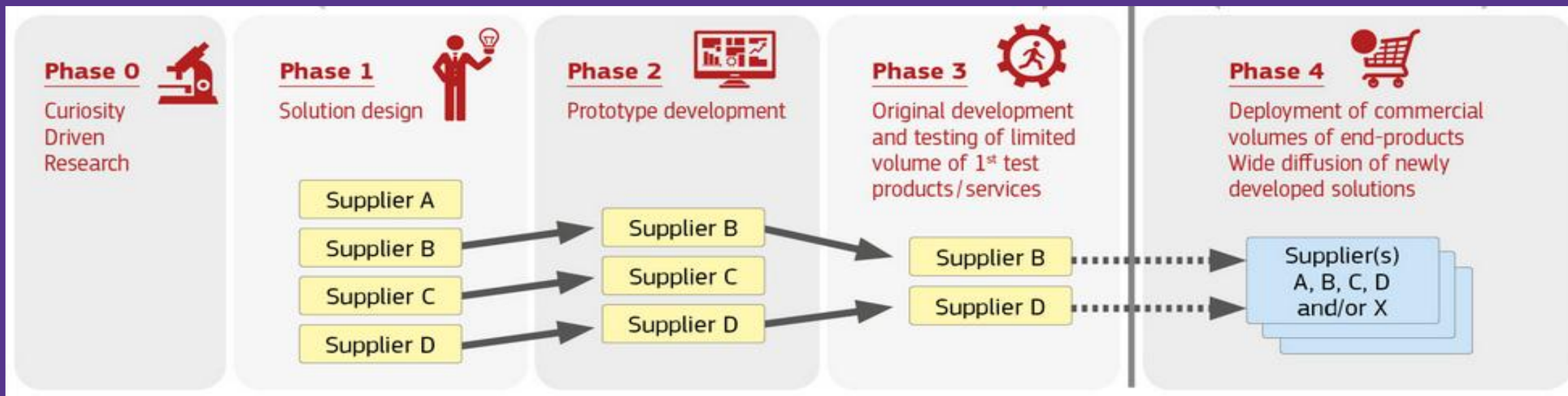
Main goals of the pilot and staged funding



- Assess whether competitive, stage-gated support can accelerate the path to market for high-risk deep tech innovations.
- Assess whether early integration of demand-side actors can enhance the relevance, validation, and ultimately the uptake of breakthrough solutions.
- Provide evidence on whether these mechanisms lead to more efficient innovation cycles and broader market adoption than other instruments within HE in general, and the EIC in particular, in similar TRL levels.



Typical staged funding vs Advanced Innovation Challenges



Entry requirements

- A prototype with a breakthrough character at TRL 4
- Access to appropriate testing infrastructure
- Have a letter of intent of an interested user with a use case

Stage 1

- Prepare and benchmark 10 breakthrough solutions and explore their feasibility and viability

Stage 2

- Further develop the 5 most promising solutions and test them in real world environments and with the involvement of users

EIC Advanced Innovation challenges 2026



Accelerating Physical AI: Embodied Intelligence
for the Next Frontier of AI Powered Robotics

€ 3 million



Translating Disruptive New Approach Methodologies
(NAMs) into Practice

€ 3 million



Indicative call budget **€ 6 million**

Info day on Advanced
Innovation Challenges
with Programme
Managers on 17
November at 14.00h

Key features of the EIC Advanced Innovation Challenge



- **Two Stage-gated funding:**
 - **Stage 1:** €300,000 lump sum for up to nine months (Q4 2026-end Q2 2027) to prepare and benchmark breakthrough solutions and explore their feasibility and viability.
 - **Stage 2:** Up to €2.5 million lump sum for up to 2.5 years to develop the most promising solutions and test them in real world environments and with users
- **Demand-side integration:**
 - Commercial users (e.g. industry or public sector) or end-users
 - Regulatory bodies or other major stakeholders.
- **Single entity or small consortia:** only monobeneficiary for Stage1
- **Proactive portfolio managements:** Each challenge is overseen by a Programme Manager ensuring coherent portfolio development.

Stage 1: Solution validation and benchmarking

Opening: December 2025 - Closing: 26th of February 2026, 17.00

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- You need to have an existing prototype or existing results at least at TRL4
- You will be expected to demonstrate the feasibility of your solution.
- And benchmark it against the state of the art solutions.
- Workshop with other Stage1 projects with ext. experts & potential users.
- EIC PMs will provide strategic guidance and support to the projects,
- Encourage collaboration & learning across projects and stakeholders.
- Projects should allocate at least 1 person month for portfolio activities.



Stage 2: Development and user testing

Closing: 18th of June 2027



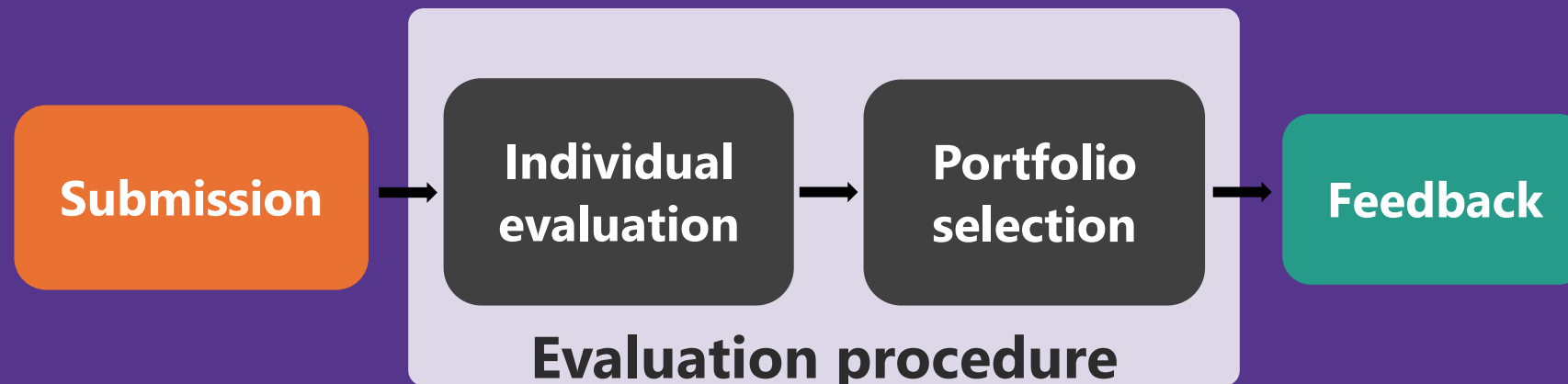
- Goal is to further develop (e.g. to TRL6/7) the most promising solutions from stage1 and test them in real world environments and with users.
- Submission of proposals via F&T limited at 22 pages.
- Not only monobeneficiary but also small consortia ≤ 3
- Evaluation evaluated (also) via live pitch in front of a Jury chaired by PM.
- The results of Stage 1 will be taken into account.
- Apart from funding you will also receive access to BAS.
- Evaluation will assess the readiness of the solution for real-world deployment, and the potential for scale-up and market uptake. The goal is to inform applicants approx. 6 weeks after 2nd stage call closure.



Stage 1: Application, evaluation and GAP



- Short Stage1 proposal length (11 A4 pages for sections 1-3).
- Two steps evaluation:
 - 1st step: each proposal evaluated remotely and scored by 3 independent experts
 - 2nd step: the PM with a small evaluation committee will select a balanced portfolio
- Please be prepared for an accelerated GAP process.
- All projects should start no later than 1st of October 2026



Step 1: Individual Remote phase



- Three independent expert evaluators to assess **each application separately** against the 3 HE award criteria (Excellence, ...) on a scale from 0 to 5:
- **The score** for each award criterion is the average of the evaluators' scores.
- **The overall score** is the sum of the (3) scores of the three award criteria.
- All proposals that **meet the thresholds** will be considered in Step 2.



Step 2: Portfolio selection



- The PM, assisted by a portfolio committee, to select a **suitable portfolio of proposals to be funded** from the above threshold proposals
- Objective is to find a balance among the selected projects across technologies, use cases, and application domains
- Main list of proposals will be established based on:
 - the **evaluation scores** from the first step;
 - **each proposal's contribution** to a balanced portfolio of projects for that challenge.





- **Clarity and relevance of the innovation idea:** Is the problem it addresses clearly defined and is the proposed innovation solving the problem in a compelling way?
- **Breakthrough nature and novelty:** Is the innovation novel compared to the state of the art? Is there disruptive potential in the specific use case?
- Are expected **performance improvements** (qualitative/quantitative) realistic and credible?

Impact: usually the Achilles heel of proposals.



- Does the innovation have the potential to develop new markets or significantly transform existing ones? Does the innovation show potential for wider adoption and scale-up?
- Is the innovation bringing sufficient added value to demonstrate attractiveness to investors, industry, or public sector procurers?
- To what extent the expected commercial impact(s) described in the proposal are credible and substantial within the project and beyond?



Implementation: last but not least!!



- **Work Plan:** Is the work plan realistic within the budget and timeline?
- **Allocation of resources:** How appropriate and effective is the allocation of resources ?
- **Quality of the applicant:** To what extent has the applicant the necessary capacity and high-quality expertise for performing all the project tasks and move decisively towards the market?



Do pay attention to (instructions from) Proposal Template!



1.1 Clarity and relevance of the innovation idea

- Describe what you are trying to do (e.g. your innovation idea). Articulate your objectives using using very little or preferably no jargon.
- Describe how is it done today, and what are the limits of current practice?

1.2 Breakthrough nature and novelty and suitability of use case

- Describe what is new/ breakthrough in your approach and how does it compare to the state of the art.
- Why do you think it will be successful?

2.1 Potential to develop new markets

- If you are successful, what difference will it make

3.1 Work plan and resources

- What are the mid-term and final “exams” to check for success? Present a list of KPI and milestones that you commit.



AIC 2025 Stage1 will use lump sums type1!

Both Challenges will use **Lump Sums**. This will remove financial reporting requirements for beneficiaries.

- Eligible costs will take the form of lump sums, with the predetermined amount (type1a).
- The expert judgement of the EIC Programme Managers shows that this topic can be appropriately addressed with an EU contribution of EUR 300,000.
- Applicants that apply agree with the predetermined LS amount as defined in WP2026 and the RAO decision authorising the use of Lump Sum type 1 for this call.

COST CATEGORY	ITEMS	COST PER ITEM	TOTAL COSTS
A. DIRECT PERSONNEL COSTS			
A.1 Employees (or equivalent)			
Engagement with stakeholders: end users, regulatory, industry	3.0	7560	22680.00
Map requirements of stakeholders	3.0	7560	22680.00
Development of methodology for performance assessment	3.0	7560	22680.00
Preparing the prototype for benchmarking	8.0	7560	60480.00
Conduct performance benchmarking	6.0	7560	45360.00
Roadmap for adoption of initial business model	1.0	7560	7560.00
Participate to common activities with other projects	1.0	7560	7560.00
B. DIRECT SUBCONTRACTING COSTS			
Market study by professional and/or use case provider or support from regulatory expert	1.0	20000	20 000.00
C. DIRECT PURCHASE COSTS			
C.1 Travel and subsistence	3.0	1000	3000.00
C.2 Equipment or Consumables			
physical components or materials for experiments in laboratory	1.0	24000	24 000.00
D. OTHER COST CATEGORIES			
D.3 Access to research infrastructure unit costs	1.0	10000	10 000.00
TOTAL DIRECT PERSONNEL COSTS AND PURCHASE COSTS (A+C)			216000.00
TOTAL DIRECT COSTS (A+B+C+D)			246000.00
E. INDIRECT COSTS (25% * (A+C))			54000.00
F. TOTAL COSTS (A+B+C+D+E)			300000.00

Useful links:

- **Calls: EIC AIC 2026**

- **Accelerating Physical AI: Embodied Intelligence for the Next Frontier of AI-Powered Robotics**

<https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/topic-details/HORIZON-EIC-2026-AIC-01?order=DESC&pageNumber=1&pageSize=50&sortBy=startDate&isExactMatch=true&status=31094501,31094502&programmePart=43121666&frameworkProgramme=43108390>

- **Translating Disruptive New Approach Methodologies (NAMs) into Practice**

<https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/topic-details/HORIZON-EIC-2026-AIC-02?isExactMatch=true&status=31094501,31094502&frameworkProgramme=43108390&programmePart=43121666&order=DESC&pageNumber=1&pageSize=50&sortBy=startDate>

- **EIC Work Programme 2026**

https://www.ncp.uefiscdi.ro/_files/ugd/9d4366_a6db3a0267d24c578176d72e5ff7b506.pdf

- **Key Novelties & Updates in EIC 2026 (RO)**

https://www.ncp.uefiscdi.ro/_files/ugd/9d4366_ea0b9f24f3974e1f91b4eafd89ea8c47.pdf

- **EIC Advanced Innovation Challenges 2026 – Info Day**

- **Full PPT** – <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/circabc-ewpp/d/d/workspace/SpacesStore/1each619-99a9-447f-826e-0a0fd1b9053a/download>

- **Video** – https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vv_OXv2_5Qo

Source: EISMEA (2025). EIC Work Programme 2026 - Info Day - Advanced Innovation Challenges [PowerPoint slides]. SlideShare.
https://eic.ec.europa.eu/events/online-info-day-eic-work-programme-2026-advanced-innovation-challenges-2025-11-17_en

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