RURACTIVE Open Call for Innovators
Guideline for Applicants

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1. What is the RURACTIVE Open Call for Innovators?

This document provides the relevant information for applicants of the **RURACTIVE Open Call for Innovators**. This section gives background information on the project and presents the open call objectives.

1.1 The RURACTIVE project

RURACTIVE is a project funded by the European Commission under the Horizon Europe programme, aiming to foster a just and sustainable transition of rural areas. The project focuses on developing **smart, tailor-made, place-based, and inclusive solutions** within local Multi-Actor Rural Innovation Ecosystems (RIEs) in twelve pilot areas, known as the Dynamos:

- Northern Ostrobothnia, Finland
- Südburgenland, Austria
- Diputación Zamora, Spain
- North-East Scotland, UK
- Andalucía, Spain
- Zagori, Greece

- Zakarpattya, Ukraine
- Fiastra Valley, Italy
- Zadar, Croatia
- Abruzzo, Italy
- Gotland, Sweden
- Törbel-Moosalpregion, Switzerland

RURACTIVE aims to unlock the innovation potential of rural communities by addressing six integrated Rural Development Drivers (RDDs):

- Sustainable agri-food systems and ecosystem management,
- Nature-based and cultural tourism,
- Culture and cultural innovation,
- Sustainable multimodal mobility,
- Energy transition and climate neutrality,
- Local services, health and wellbeing.

These efforts are complemented by transversal integration of climate change mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity, social justice and inclusion.

The project seeks to empower rural communities to drive societal change by making existing knowledge around smart solutions accessible, integrating various forms of innovation (digital, technological, technical, organisational, social, business models, and financial), and enhancing community capacities and skills through training, capacity building, and knowledge transfer.

Figure 1: RURACTIVE Rural Development Drivers (RDDs)

1.2 The Open Call for Innovators

To further achieve its objectives, the RURACTIVE consortium is launching an **Open Call for Innovators.** This competitive process invites innovators from across Europe to co-develop smart and tailored solutions that address the challenges presented by RURACTIVE's twelve pilot areas (Dynamos). Detailed descriptions of the challenges of each Dynamo can be found in the document 'Open Call Challenges'.

Read the Open Call Challenges

Selected applicants will take part in the **RURACTIVE Innovators Programme**, getting equity-free funding (Financial Support to Third Parties - FSTP), knowledge and tools to deploy and refine their solution alongside community members in real-life rural settings. With guidance from the RURACTIVE team, who will mentor and assess their performance, innovators will contribute to tangible impact and societal change and receive close support to replicate their projects in other regions within 12 dynamos and thus explore further business opportunities.

The **Guidelines for Applicants** - this document - provides an overview of the programme's approach and detailed information on how to participate in the RURACTIVE Open Call. Potential applicants are advised to **read this guide and all associated documentation carefully**.

Apply now and become a part of the innovative wave transforming rural Europe!
* https://www.ruractive.eu/open-call

1.3 Disclaimer

This guide is intended to support potential applicants in applying for the RURACTIVE project's Open Call for Innovators. It is provided for informational purposes only and is not intended to replace consultation of any applicable legal sources. The European Commission cannot be held responsible for any use made of this guidance document.

2. What does RURACTIVE offer?

RURACTIVE has a 1.2 million EUR fund to be distributed in FSTP. Selected applicants to the Open Call will gain access to the first stage of the **RURACTIVE Innovators Programme**, and gain the opportunity to be selected later onto its second stage:

1. **Stage 1 (Duration: two (2) months)**

From the Open Call applicants, 36 projects will be selected to enter stage 1. The programme beneficiaries - the RURACTIVE Innovators - will receive a wide range of value-added services and funding.

- **Funding and Initial Support**: Receive funding of **€5.000,00 (per project idea)** to present your innovative project to the consortium and support the travel to Dynamo's territory you want to support.
- **Direct Collaboration:** Work closely with rural dynamos to co-develop solutions that meet real community needs. Participate in a local workshop to get involved with local community members, fine-tune and present your solution.
- **Expert Guidance:** Benefit from a mentor who will guide you through the entire programme, ensuring alignment with RURACTIVE objectives and supporting your project's development.
- **Opportunity to be selected to stage 2:** through the development of the detailed implementation plan after the workshop at the Dynamos.

2. **Stage 2 (Duration: eighteen (18) months – six (6) months for development and implementation + twelve (12) months validation and impact assessment)**

At the end of stage 1, up to 24 innovators (up to two per dynamo) will be selected to enter stage 2, being invited to develop, deploy and assess their solutions.

- **Additional Funding:** Receive additional funding up to €55.000 for single applicants or € 85.000,00 for consortia to further develop your project.
- **Development and implementation:** six-month period to develop and implement the solution adapted to the Dynamos territories.
- **Validation and impact assessment**: Period to be defined by applicants to run pilot validation, depending on the solution.
- **Extended Deployment:** Engage in a programme for pilot development, focusing on the deployment of your solution. Develop a sustainability plan to ensure that the solution will be operative for at least one year after the end of the stage 2.

- **Capacity Building:** Participate in comprehensive training and capacity-building activities with experts (tech and rural), enhancing your skills and knowledge. In specific, the teams will avail of 2 online design thinking workshops (half a day each) focusing on providing support in the development of the solutions. The themes covered in the workshops will be "Need Statement Development" and "Mission Model and Value Proposition".

2.1 Innovation Call Budget

Total available funding for Innovation Call is €1.200.000,00 where up to 36 beneficiaries will receive up to €90.000,00 to implement projects within the eligible regions and selected challenges.

Maximum funding per stage
An overview of Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the RURACTIVE Open call can be found in Table 1.

Table 1: Overview of the RURACTIVE funding stages

	No. funded projects	Budget	Total budget	Innovators programme start date	Innovators programme duration
Stage 1	36	€5.000 Per solution	€180.000,00	March 2025	1 month and 5 days March-May 2025
Stage 2	12-24	€55.000 For single applicants €85.000 For consortia	€1.020.000,00	June 2025	6 months (June-November 2025) + 12 months (December 2025-November 2026)
Total		up to €90.000,00	€1.200.000,00		

The contribution to all accepted projects will be 100%. The maximum funding to each third-party is €60.000, in any form. No participant will be awarded with more than one project and more than €60.000,00. The maximum grant to be funded per subproject will be €90.000,00 (only for a consortium consisting of two entities).

Funding for researchers and innovators based in Switzerland (including companies and SMEs) for their participation in eligible projects as associated partners from a non-associated third state will be provided by the Swiss Government (State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation - SERI) for all 2024 calls of Horizon Europe and the Euratom programme.

3. What is the timeline?

This section defines the most important dates of the Open Call and the RURACTIVE Programme for Innovators.

Open Call for Innovators

Start of the submission to the Open Call for Innovators	6th of December 2024
Open Call deadline	5th of February 2025 at 17:00 CET time (Brussels time)

RURACTIVE Innovators Programme

The indicative timeline during which each stage of the RURACTIVE Innovators Programme is presented in the Table 4 below.

Table 2: Timeline of the RURACTIVE Innovators Programme

Stage 1: Co-Tuning & working with Dynamos	25th of March – 9th of May 2025 (1 month + 5 days)
Evaluation and selection of projects for the Stage 2	12th of May – 2nd of June 2025
Stage 2: * - **Develop and Implement** - **Validate and test the solutions** - **Assess Impact** ** if selected*	June 2025 – November 2026 (18 months) − 6th of June 2025 – 30th of November 2025 (6 months) − 1st of December 2025 – 30th of November 2026 (12 months)

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 RURACTIVE team along the process and are not restrictive.

The RURACTIVE consortium reserves the right to cancel the Open Call at any point due to any unforeseen circumstances. The RURACTIVE consortium also reserves the right to extend the call and/or launch an additional call in case not enough applications of sufficient quality have been received via the Open Call for Innovators.

4. Who can apply?

This section defines the requirements that must be met by all applying entities and consortia to be eligible.

4.1 Type of Entities

The RURACTIVE Open Call for Innovators is open to:

- **Single applicants (SMEs/startups)**
  Single entities which are SMEs/startups eligible under [Horizon Europe rules for participation](#) and who are a solution provider may apply to the RURACTIVE Open Call.

- **Consortia led by SMEs/startups**
  In addition, RURACTIVE is open to projects developed by a consortium of maximum two entities, out of which the coordinator must be an individual SME/startup. The second consortium member may be:
    - SMEs/startups,
    - mid-caps,
    - researchers/academia;
        - 🟡 **Note**: research institutes and academia are eligible for funding up to 40% of the sub-project budget.
    - rural associations (legally registered)

Natural persons applying alone are not eligible.

4.2. Eligibility criteria

1. Each legal entity or member of a consortium will be eligible to participate in the Open Call with only **one** application.
2. In any case, no participant will be awarded with more than **one** project and more than €60.000,00. The maximum grant to be funded per subproject will be €90.000,00 (consortium of two entities).
3. Single applicants and consortium members will be considered eligible for RURACTIVE Open Call if they comply with **ALL the following rules:**

a. They are a legal entity established and based in one of the EU Member States or a Horizon Europe Associated country as defined in [Horizon Europe rules for participation](#) and entities from Switzerland.

b. They are an entity described in section 5.1.

c. Applicants should be able to prove their financial stability and capacity to deliver the work.

d. SMEs and startup SMEs must have been established at least one year before the submission of the application.

e. Have not been convicted for fraudulent behaviours, other financial irregularities, unethical or illegal business practices.

f. Are not under liquidation or an enterprise under difficulty according to the Commission Regulation No 651/2014 art. 2.18.

g. Are not a consortium partner, nor affiliated with the activities of consortium partners, nor any party that may have conflicts of interest (section 8.3.1). Local Community trainers involved within the RURACTIVE project, are not eligible to apply to the Open Call.

4. **Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)** are considered eligible ONLY if complying with the [Commission Recommendation 2003/361/EC](#) and [the SME user guide](#). In summary, the criteria which define an SME are:

a. Independent (not linked or owned by another enterprise), in accordance with Recommendation 2003/361/EC.

b. Headcount in Annual Work Unit (AWU) less than 250.

c. Annual turnover less or equal to €50 million OR annual balance sheet total less or equal to €43 million.

5. What is expected from the selected applicants?

5.1 Implementation and reporting

Selected applicants participating in the RURACTIVE Open Call will be responsible for the following duties:

5.1.1 Project Implementation:

The projects will run from March 25th, 2025, and conclude with the implementation phase by December 10th, 2025. Validation and impact assessment will run until November 30th, 2026. Applicants must adhere to this timeline and demonstrate tangible progress throughout the implementation phase.

5.1.2 Project stages and Reporting:

Projects will be divided for up to 2 stages and will follow requirements as shown in the stage schedule described below, in the table 2.

At the end of each stage, applicants will have to deliver the assigned report or deliverable as a means of verification of work performed. Each report and deliverable will be evaluated to check the progress of project implementation.

Table 3: Project stages and reporting

Stage name	Outcome of the stage	Timeline
Stage 1	A report of the activities developed/ attended during the 2 months. A technical consortium member should approve this report before the payment. Deliverable - detailed implementation plan.	7 days before the end of Stage 1
Stage 2	Mid-term report	By the last day of the 3-months development and implementation Stage
	Final development and implementation phase report /deliverable	within 10 days after completing the 6 months development and implementation Stage
	Mid-term validation phase report	within 10 days after completing the first half of the validation Stage
	Final report	within 10 days after completing the project

5.1.3 Mentorship:

Each selected project will be assigned a mentor from the RURACTIVE consortium. The mentor will provide guidance, monitor progress, and ensure that the project aligns with the predefined goals. The mentor will be the key point of contact for the applicants and will assist in overcoming any challenges faced during the project implementation.

5.2 Financial support provided

Successful proposals shall receive the requested financial contribution in the form of a lump sum, following the payment schedule. Detailed payment schedule and payment conditions will be settled in the Sub-grant Agreement (Annex 5).

5.3 Payment scheme

Successful proposals shall receive the requested financial contribution in the form of a lump sum, following the payment schedule described below (Table 3).

Table 4: RURACTIVE Open Call Payment scheme

Phase	Payment number	Amount (Single / Consortium)	Timeline
1st Phase: Stage 1	1st payment	€5.000,00 per project	At the end of the co-tuning phase, in month 3 of the RURACTIVE Innovators programme
2nd Phase* Stage 2 Development and implementation	2nd payment	€20.000,00 single entities / €30.000,00 consortium	At the middle of the development and implementation phase, in month 7 of the RURACTIVE Innovators programme
	3rd payment	€25.000,00 single entities / €40.000,00 consortium	At the end of the development and implementation phase, in month 9 of the RURACTIVE Innovators programme
3rd Phase* Stage 2 Validate and assessment	4th payment	€5.000,00 single entities / €7.500,00 consortium	At the middle of Validate & Assess impact
	5th payment	€5.000,00 single entities / €7.500,00 consortium	End of Validate & Assess impact

* Only applicants selected for Stage 2

Entities from Switzerland, will need to contact SERI, to receive payments.

6. How to apply?

This section explains the submission process and defines the rules and procedures on how to apply to the Open Call.

6.1 Means of submission

The applicants can submit their proposals only through the F6S platform:
https://www.f6s.com/ruractive-open-call-for-innovators/apply

The submission window opens on 6th of December 2024 **and closes on 5th of February 2025 at 17:00 CET.**

Applications submitted via any other channel will be automatically rejected. The applicants are required to **register a profile at www.f6s.com** to submit a proposal.

The application form template - **RURACTIVE Application form template** is available on RURACTIVE website: https://www.ruractive.eu/open-call. The template is extracted as a document for reference purposes only. The Application form should be directly filled at the F6S platform.

We recommend becoming familiar with **RURACTIVE Sub-grant agreement, SME declaration and Declaration of Honour**. These documents must be provided if the applicant is selected and are mandatory to finalise the contract and enter to the project implementation phase.

We strongly recommend not waiting until the last moment of submission. **Failure of the proposal to arrive in time for any reason, including communications delays, or network issues is not acceptable as an extenuating circumstance and will automatically lead to rejection of the submission.** The time of receipt of the proposal as recorded by the submission system will be definitive.

Important: Please note that after application submission, editing is not possible. If an error is discovered and the call deadline has not passed, the applicant may request a resubmission by contacting the RURACTIVE Open Call team at **support@f6s.com**, using the subject line: "**RESUBMISSION REQUEST**". While we will make every effort to process resubmission requests, we cannot guarantee the feasibility of resubmitting before the deadline if the request is not received in a timely manner.

All decisions made by the RURACTIVE Open Call team regarding submission and resubmission are final.

Documents required in subsequent stages will be sent to the RURACTIVE partners managing the Open Call for Innovators at: opencall@ruractive.eu.

6.2 Application Form

The Application Form can be accessed in the link above on the F6S platform (https://www.f6s.com/ruractive-open-call-for-innovators/apply). However, a copy of the application form can be found at https://www.ruractive.eu/open-call, for applicants' reference.

6.3 Language

Applications for RURACTIVE Open Call must be done in the English language. Submissions done in any other languages will be considered ineligible and will not be evaluated.
English is the only official language during the whole implementation of the RURACTIVE project. This means that any requested submission of documentation and deliverables will be done in English to be eligible.

6.4 Terms and Definitions

A Glossary with important terms for the Open Call for Innovators and the RURACTIVE Innovators Programme can be found at the end of this document.

7. How will applications be evaluated and selected for Stage 1?

This section defines the rules and procedures which will be performed for the evaluation of the Open Call and selection of innovators.

7.1. Evaluation steps

The evaluations will take place remotely and will be organised in the following steps:
- **Step 1: Eligibility Check**: An initial eligibility check will be carried out to verify that the applications meet the conditions expressed in section 5 and to discard non-eligible applications.
- **Step 2: Individual External Evaluation:** Each application will be assigned to at least two independent experts, not involved in the RURACTIVE consortium, to safeguard from any conflict of interest or bias. The experts will perform an individual evaluation.
- **Step 3: Consensus Evaluation:** After the individual evaluation, the external experts will have a consensus online meeting to agree on a common evaluation text and a score.
- **Step 4: Panel Evaluation:** Finally, to smooth any human factors and to ensure alignment with the project objectives, all evaluators will have a common online panel together with representatives from the consortium, aimed to short list the applications and complete the final ranking.

7.2. Step 1: Eligibility Check

An initial eligibility check will be performed to filter and discard non-eligible proposals. All proposals must meet the following criteria:

1. Submission has been made only through the F6S platform and by the defined deadline [Yes/No].
2. The applicant submitted only one proposal, which is fully completed, including all required sections and attachments [Yes/No].
3. The lead applicant is an SME or startup legally registered and established in one of the EU Member States or a Horizon Europe-associated country as defined in Horizon Europe rules for participation.
4. The proposal is written entirely in English [Yes/No].
5. The applicants meet the conditions specified in section "Who can apply" [Yes/No]
6. Proposals must meet ALL the eligibility criteria.

Proposals must meet **ALL the eligibility criteria**. Proposals that do not meet one or more of the criteria will be deemed non-eligible and discarded. Eligible proposals will be shortlisted for the next step of the evaluation process.

Applicants whose proposals are deemed non-eligible will be notified via email of the results of the eligibility check. The eligibility check is final and not subject to appeal.

7.3. Steps 2-4: Selection

7.3.1. Eligibility Criteria for Stage 1
The proposals will need to meet all the proposal's eligibility criteria.

Table 5: RURACTIVE Open Call Eligibility Criteria

Criteria	Description
Alignment	● The proposal must be aligned with the RURACTIVE challenge selected.

7.3.2. Selection Criteria for Stage 1
The applications will be scored based on the criteria in the table below.

Table 6: RURACTIVE Open Call Selection Criteria

Criteria	Description
Criterion 1: Concept and Innovation	● Innovation of the proposed solution, also according to the RUARCTIVE types of innovation (technological technical social, organizational and governance and financial innovation) ● Novelty and feasibility of the proposed project in relation with the territory where it is going to be develop and validated

	● Uniqueness of proposal: applications submitted to the RURACTIVE Open Call for Innovators should be unique and tailored to the local context of the Dynamos.
Criterion 2: Implementation approach	● Analysis of the technological and implementation capacity (existing and target TRL). ● Quality and feasibility of the developed implementation plan. ● Quality and feasibility of the validation and impact assessment plan.
Criterion 3: Impact	● Economic and societal impact of the proposed solution, including the European dimension, cross-border scalability and the possibility of replication. ● Market potential, exploitation/business plan and go-to-market strategy, including local user engagement and support. ● Potential to revitalise the concerned rural area with the involvement of local stakeholders. ● Open-source and open data delivery. ● Feasibility of maintaining the pilot after the end of the RURACTIVE Innovators programme until June 2027 with no additional funding.
Criterion 4: Applicant/Team	● Demonstrated capacity to perform and implement the proposed solution, including technological and business expertise. ● Demonstrated capacity to perform and implement the validation and impact assessment tasks with the Dynamos and local end users. ● Allocation and justification of requested resources.

For each criterion under examination, score values represent the rationale detailed in the table below.

Table 7: RURACTIVE Open Call Scoring levels

Score	Rationale
0 - Fail	The proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be judged due to missing or incomplete information.
1 - Poor	The application addresses the criterion in an inadequate manner or there are significant weaknesses.
2 - Fair	The application addresses the criterion broadly, but there are still several weaknesses.
3 - Good	The application addresses the criterion well, but improvements are

	necessary.
4 - Very Good	The application addresses the criterion very well, but some improvements are still possible.
5 - Excellent	The application successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.

Each criterion will be scored between 0 and 5. Half-point scores are not given. The final score (including for each criterion) is calculated based on the average of the scores provided by the evaluators. Therefore, final scores may be decimals. The threshold for each criterion is three (3), therefore any criterion with a score less than three will disqualify the application.

Applications submitted for RURACTIVE Open Call shall be unique and tailored to the local context of the Dynamo challenges. Evaluators will flag up applications with duplicate content. These applications cannot be considered for RURACTIVE Open Call for Innovators and will be rejected in the evaluation process under criterion one (Concept and innovation).

At the end of the evaluation process, all eligible applications will be ranked per issued challenge.
- Rule 1: The applications will be ranked based on their overall score (sum of criterion 1 to 4 scores).
- Rule 2: If there is a tie between applications, these will be ranked according to the following order:
    - I.   Best score on Impact (Criterion 3)
    - II.   Best score on Concept and Innovation (Criterion 1);
    - III. Best score on Technology implementation approach (Criterion 2);
    - IV.   Best score on Applicant/Team (Criterion 4).
- Rule 3: In case following Rule 3 there are proposals in the same position, priority will be given to the number of female team members.
- Rule 4: In case following Rule 4 there are proposals in the same position, priority will be given to the application that increases RURACTIVE project footprint in Europe.
- Rule 5: In case following Rule 5 there are still proposals in a funding borderline position, the panel evaluation will be asked to read the specific proposals and break the tie by re-evaluating them.

7.2.2. Number of projects selected
RURACTIVE will select **36 projects** to enter stage 1, aiming to select 3 projects per Dynamo, preferably addressing different challenges. If there is a significant difference in scoring between projects with the highest ranking applying to different challenges, RURACTIVE may decide to select more than 3 projects per Dynamo and less in others.

After the completion of stage 1, 12-24 projects will be selected to enter stage 2 of the RURACTIVE Innovators Programme.

7.2.3. Notification of results

All applicants will be notified of the results of the evaluation and will receive an Evaluation Summary Report (ESR).

7.3. Reserve list

RURACTIVE will keep a reasonable number of applications in a reserve list, in case an applicant decides to withdraw or is not able to fulfil the contract requirements.

7.4. Redress process

Within 3 working days of the delivery of a rejection letter considering the application as non-eligible or an ESR, an applicant may submit a request for redress if they believe the results of the eligibility check have not been correctly applied, or if they feel that there has been a shortcoming in the way their application has been evaluated that may affect the final decision on whether to enter the RURACTIVE Programme for Innovators.

In such a case, an internal review committee from RURACTIVE will examine the applicant's request for redress. The committee's role is to ensure a coherent interpretation of such requests and equal treatment of applicants. Requests for redress must:
- Be related to the evaluation process or eligibility checks.
- Clearly describe the complaint (in English).
- Sent by the entity's legal representative who has also submitted the proposal.

The committee will review the complaint and will recommend an appropriate course of action. If there is clear evidence of a shortcoming that could affect the eventual funding decision, it is possible that all or part of the application will be re-evaluated. Please note:
- This procedure is concerned only with the general evaluation and/or eligibility checking process. The committee will not question the scientific or technical judgement of the evaluators.
- A re-evaluation will only be carried out if there is evidence of a shortcoming that affects the final decision on whether to fund the proposal or not. This means, for example, that a problem relating to one evaluation criterion will not lead to a re-evaluation if a proposal has failed anyway on other criteria.
- The evaluation score following any re-evaluation will be regarded as definitive. It may be lower than the original score.

All requests for redress will be treated in confidence and must be sent to the RURACTIVE team at: opencall@ruractive.eu.

7.5 Application and Selection for Stage 2

Starting in May 2025, the internal evaluation of innovators for the RURACTIVE Stage 2 will begin and last for a month. The successful completion of the RURACTIVE Stage 1 is obligatory to enter the evaluation for Stage 2, as delays will impact but not prevent the success of the project, and the possibility of releasing funds to the beneficiary in the expected timeframes. The project must complete the work defined in the work plan provided in their application and refined during the Stage 1 for this period.

The goals of Stage 1 are:

- Travel to the Dynamo location to run a co-tuning workshop with the Dynamos organization and local stakeholders – the co-tuning workshop will allow the innovators to present their project to the local community and to the local RURACTIVE partners and receive feedback to co-tune its solution to the local background

- Develop a detailed implementation plan (technical and financial feasibility will be considered) and plan the technical integration with the Dynamos

- In cases where approval from the Ethical Committee is required for the completion of the project, submit the research protocol. This may depend on your country's specific laws.

The Stage 1 is finalised by submitting a revised version of the proposal that reflects the context and knowledge of the specific dynamo for evaluation. The Stage 2 starts after the completion of Stage 1 and the evaluation period which has a duration of 1 month. The project must complete the work defined in the work plan provided in the Technical Proposal, for this period as well as address comments from the internal evaluators. During the Stage 2, the innovators must:

- Plan with the assigned mentor how the project will be implemented and monitored, and attend the meetings with the agreed periodicity,

- Develop and implement the solution within the selected Dynamo location,

- Validate and test the solutions within the selected Dynamo location,
- Assess impacts of the solution

The goals of the Stage 2 are:

- Complete the development and implementation of the solution within the selected Dynamo location,

- Validate and test the solutions within the selected Dynamo location,

- Assess impacts of the solution
- Agreement on an IP and licensing model, and the signature of IP documents and licensing models by the end of the implementation and development phase.

The specific goals of Stage 2 should be defined by the Beneficiary in the implementation section of the proposal and on Deliverable 1. Stage 2 is finalised by submitting a technical report for evaluation, Deliverable 2 (D2).

The innovators who successfully pass Stage 1 will be scored to enter Stage 2 based on the criteria in the table below.

7.6 How will applications be evaluated and selected for Stage 2?

This section defines the rules and procedures which will be performed for the evaluation of the Open Call and selection of innovators for the Stage 2.

7.6.1. Evaluation steps

The evaluations will take place remotely and will be organised in the following steps:
- **Step 1: Eligibility Check**: An initial eligibility check will be carried out to verify that the applications meet the conditions expressed in section 7.6 and to discard non-eligible applications.
- **Step 2: Individual Internal Evaluation:** Each application will be assigned to at least two independent experts, involved in the RURACTIVE consortium, to safeguard from any conflict of interest or bias. The experts will perform an individual evaluation.
- **Step 3: Panel Evaluation:** Finally, to smooth any human factors and to ensure alignment with the project objectives, all evaluators will have a common online panel, aimed to short list the applications and complete the final ranking.

7.6.2 Eligibility Check

An initial eligibility check will be performed to filter and discard non-eligible proposals. All proposals must meet the following criteria:

7. Submission has been made only through the F6S platform and by the defined deadline [Yes/No].
8. The applicant submitted only one proposal, which is fully completed, including all required sections and attachments [Yes/No].
9. The lead applicant is an SME or startup legally registered and established in one of the EU Member States or a Horizon Europe-associated country as defined in Horizon Europe rules for participation.
10. The proposal is written entirely in English [Yes/No].
11. The applicants meet the conditions specified in section "Who can apply" [Yes/No]
12. Proposals must meet ALL the eligibility criteria.

Proposals must meet **ALL the eligibility criteria**. Proposals that do not meet one or more of the criteria will be deemed non-eligible and discarded. Eligible proposals will be shortlisted for the next step of the evaluation process.

Applicants whose proposals are deemed non-eligible will be notified via email of the results of the eligibility check. The eligibility check is final and not subject to appeal.

7.6.3. Eligibility Criteria for Stage 2
The proposals will need to meet all the proposal's eligibility criteria.

Table 8: RURACTIVE Phase 2 Eligibility Criteria

Criteria	Description
Phase 1	● The proposal has completed Phase 1
Alignment	● The proposal must be aligned with the RURACTIVE challenge selected.
Consistency	● Updates to the proposal to phase 2 are limited to the knowledge acquired during phase 1 and preserve the essence of the initial proposal.

7.3.2. Selection Criteria for Stage 2
The applications will be scored based on the criteria in the table below.

Table 9: RURACTIVE Open Call Stage 2 Selection Criteria

Criteria	Description
Criterion 1: Concept and Innovation	● Novelty and feasibility of the proposed project in relation with the territory where it is going to be develop and validate ● Design, reliability, feasibility, and quality of the proposed application.
Criterion 2: Implementation approach	● Quality and feasibility of the developed implementation plan. ● Details on how the proposed components will be tested and validated in the context of the Dynamo territory. ● Quality and feasibility of the validation and impact assessment plan.
Criterion 3: Impact	● Potential local user engagement and support. ● Potential to revitalise the concerned rural area with the involvement of local stakeholders. ● Open-source and open data delivery

	● Feasibility of maintaining the pilot after the end of the RURACTIVE Innovators programme until June 2027 with no additional funding.
Criterion 4: Applicant/Team	● Demonstrated capacity to perform and implement the validation and impact assessment tasks with the Dynamos and local end users. ● Allocation and justification of requested resources.

For each criterion under examination, score values represent the rationale detailed in table 7.

Each criterion will be scored between 0 and 5. Half-point scores are not given. The final score (including for each criterion) is calculated based on the average of the scores provided by the evaluators. Therefore, the final scores may be decimals. The threshold for each criterion is three (3), therefore any criterion with a score less than three will disqualify the application.

Applications submitted for RURACTIVE Open Call shall be unique and tailored to the local context of the Dynamo challenges. Evaluators will flag up applications with duplicate content. These applications cannot be considered for RURACTIVE Open Call for Innovators and will be rejected in the evaluation process under criterion one (Concept and innovation).

At the end of the evaluation process, all eligible applications will be ranked per issued challenge.
- Rule 1: The applications will be ranked based on their overall score (sum of criterion 1 to 4 scores).
- Rule 2: If there is a tie between applications, these will be ranked according to the following order:
  - I. Best score on Impact (Criterion 3)
  - II. Best score on Concept and Innovation (Criterion 1);
  - III. Best score on Technology implementation approach (Criterion 2);
  - IV. Best score on Applicant/Team (Criterion 4).
- Rule 3: In case following Rule 3 there are proposals in the same position, priority will be given to the number of female team members.
- Rule 4: In case following Rule 4 there are proposals in the same position, priority will be given to the application that increases RURACTIVE project footprint in Europe.
- Rule 5: In case following Rule 5 there are still proposals in a funding borderline position, the panel evaluation will be asked to read the specific proposals and break the tie by re-evaluating them.

7.5.1. Number of projects selected
RURACTIVE will select **12-24 projects** to enter stage 2, aiming to select 2 projects per Dynamo, preferably addressing different challenges.

7.5.2. Notification of results

All applicants will be notified of the results of the evaluation and will receive an Evaluation Summary Report (ESR).

7.7. Reserve list

RURACTIVE will keep a reasonable number of applications in a reserve list, in case an applicant decides to withdraw or is not able to fulfil the contract requirements.

7.8. Redress process

Within 3 working days of the delivery of a rejection letter considering the application as non-eligible or an ESR, an applicant may submit a request for redress if they believe the results of the eligibility check have not been correctly applied, or if they feel that there has been a shortcoming in the way their application has been evaluated that may affect the final decision on whether to enter the RURACTIVE Programme for Innovators.

In such a case, an internal review committee from RURACTIVE will examine the applicant's request for a redress. The committee's role is to ensure a coherent interpretation of such requests, and equal treatment of applicants. Requests for redress must:
- Be related to the evaluation process or eligibility checks.
- Clearly describe the complaint (in English).
- Sent by the entity's legal representative that has also submitted the proposal.

The committee will review the complaint and will recommend an appropriate course of action. If there is clear evidence of a shortcoming that could affect the eventual funding decision, it is possible that all or part of the application will be re-evaluated. Please note:
- This procedure is concerned only with the general evaluation and/or eligibility checking process. The committee will not question the scientific or technical judgement of the evaluators.
- A re-evaluation will only be carried out if there is evidence of a shortcoming that affects the final decision on whether to fund the proposal or not. This means, for example, that a problem relating to one evaluation criterion will not lead to a re-evaluation if a proposal has failed anyway on other criteria.
- The evaluation score following any re-evaluation will be regarded as definitive. It may be lower than the original score.

All requests for redress will be treated in confidence and must be sent to the RURACTIVE team at: opencall@ruractive.eu.

8. What other considerations should you be aware of?

8.1 Contractual phase

After the evaluation phase is concluded and the innovators are selected, the RURACTIVE consortium will start the contract preparation phase.

The contracts with the sub-granted beneficiaries accurately cover all the legal issues. A written Subgrantee agreement will be signed with successful applicants. It will foresee, among other things, the special clauses derived from Horizon Europe in cascading granting, the payment schedule and conditions (milestones), general legal text issues of rights and obligations by the RURACTIVE consortium, and each sub-grantee, including IPR and audit procedures.

The sub-grantee agreement will also have a set of annexes like the technical description of the project (form submitted), bank account information form, the guideline of the call, and any other document required by RURACTIVE to ensure the correct execution of the sub-grantee projects.

Each winning applicant will sign a subgrantee agreement with the project consortium. A legal entity that does not provide the requested data and documents in due time will be discarded from the RURACTIVE FSTP Programme.

The documents that will be submitted by the subgrantee are the following:
- Copy of ID card or Passport of the legal representative(s) of the organisation
- Copy of the original Extract of organisation registration
- Copy of VAT registration certificate,
- Copy of the Organisation's Proof of Address

During this phase, all the information provided will be verified by the F6S team to ensure the organisation's existence and non-compliance with bankruptcy and other financial issues that do not meet with the general law, and the European Commission recommendations, principles and best practices.

Entities from Switzerland, if selected to participate in the programme, will need to contact SERI, to apply for national funding and signing of funding agreements.

8.2 Sub-grant agreement signature

After the final project selection, the RURACTIVE consortium will start the contract preparation phase in collaboration with the representatives of the projects that have been awarded. We will

ask you to provide the necessary documents which are mentioned in the table below. All documentation requires a signature and must be signed with a valid electronic digital signature.

Table 10: Documents necessary for the contract preparation phase

Requirement	Description
Proof of legal existence	Company Register, Official Gazette or another official document per country showing the name of the organisation, the legal address and registration number and a copy of a document proving VAT registration (in case the VAT number does not show on the registration extract or its equivalent).

Specific to SMEs
 	
1.Proof of the SME condition is required:
 	
● If the applicant has been fully validated as an SME on the Beneficiary Register Participant Portal, the PIC number must be provided.
● If the applicant has not been fully validated as an SME on the Participant Portal, the following documents will be required to prove the status as an SME:
 	
    o **SME Declaration** signed (with a valid e-signature) and stamped: In the event the beneficiary declares being non-autonomous, the balance sheet and profit and loss account (with annexes) for the last period for upstream and downstream organisations is required.
 	
    o Status Information Form, which includes the headcount (AWU), balance, profit & loss accounts of the latest closed financial year and the relation, upstream and downstream, of any linked or partner company.
 	
2. Supporting documents:
 	
In cases where either the number of employees or the ownership is not clearly identified: any other supporting documents which demonstrate headcount and ownership such as payroll details, annual reports, national regional, association records, etc.	

Sub-grant agreement	The contract is signed between the RURACTIVE Consortium represented by its coordinator (UNIBO), Treasurer (F6S Tech) and the beneficiary. Contract as provided to the sub-grantee is final and may not be changed.

Declaration of Honour	The Document which covers all conditions related to RURACTIVE Open Call signed by the legal representative of the applying entity.
Bank Account information	The account where the funds will be transferred will be indicated via a specific form signed by the entity.

It should be emphasised that each participating SME should provide at the contract preparation time a valid VAT number[1]. Failure to provide a valid VAT number will automatically result in exclusion from the contract preparation.

Please make sure you provide documents within the deadlines that will be communicated to you. If you fail to deliver the requested documents on time, without clear and reasonable justification, you will be excluded from the further formal assessment and you will be replaced with the applicant from the Reserve List. In general, the negotiation should be concluded **within 2 weeks**.

8.3 Responsibilities of the third parties

This section defines the obligations of the innovators that are selected in the Open Call.

8.3.1 Conflict of interest

Applications will not be accepted from entities who are partners (beneficiaries) or affiliated entities/linked third parties in the RURACTIVE consortium or who are formally linked in any way to them. Any entity with a previous formal and legal connection to a RURACTIVE beneficiary (e.g., spin-off), will not be accepted, unless a minimum of 3 years (as of 1 January 2024) has passed since the termination of the connection.

Applicants must not have any current and/or potential conflict of interest with the RURACTIVE Open Call for Innovators selection process and during the whole programme. Applicants must formally and immediately notify the RURACTIVE project of any situation constituting or likely to lead to a conflict of interests and take all the necessary steps to rectify this situation.

All cases of conflict of interest will be assessed case by case. Applicants must take all measures to prevent any situation where the impartial and objective evaluation and implementation of the project is compromised for reasons involving economic interest, political or national affinity, family or emotional ties or any other shared interest ('conflict of interests').

If a conflict of interest is discovered and confirmed at the time of the evaluation process, the application will be considered as non-eligible and will not be evaluated.

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[1] To be checked at European Commission services such as http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/vies/

8.3.2 Checks and reviews

The EC may, at any time during the implementation of the sub-project and up to five years after the end of the sub-project, arrange for a check and review to be carried out, by external auditors, or by the EC services themselves, including the European Anti-Fraud office (OLAF). The procedure shall be deemed to be initiated on the date of receipt of the relevant letter sent by the EC.

There will be no financial checks, reviews, or audits to check costs, since beneficiaries have no obligation to document the costs incurred for the action. Checks, reviews, and audits will focus on the technical implementation of the action.

8.3.3 Promoting the action and giving visibility to the EU funding

The third parties which will receive funding must promote the sub-project, the RURACTIVE project and its results, by providing targeted information to multiple audiences (including the media and the public) in a strategic and effective manner and to highlight the financial support of the EC. Further details will be provided in the Sub-Grant Agreement, and the RURACTIVE Communication team will guide and support these communication activities.

8.4 Intellectual Property Rights

The results and IPR developed during the sub-granted project implementation will be the exclusive property of the corresponding beneficiary. The applicants are advised to include Intellectual Property Rights generated from the project teams through RURACTIVE funding in their internal Consortium Agreement.

While the RURACTIVE project will support its beneficiaries in creating conditions for their solution to reach the market, it is also expected that the beneficiaries contribute with open results. Therefore, while the results and IPR remain the property of the beneficiaries, these should make available in open source all or parts of the solution available in open source.

The third parties must comply with IP rules outlined in the Sub-Grant Agreement, which has rules in compliance with the FSTP rules established for the Horizon Europe Programme. In general terms, this includes the following aspects:

- The granting consortium - RURACTIVE - will not obtain ownership of the results generated under sub-granted projects.
- Third-party results will remain the property of the third parties.
- The third-party will be responsible for any costs associated with Intellectual Property Right protection.
- A licensing model is suggested following the principles of free use for research and paid for commercial use.
- As part of the sub-grant agreement, a milestone within stage 2 will be included where the third party must reach agreement with the RURACTIVE consortium and the local region regarding licensing model before any funding is released. Such an agreement shall

provide free or discounted access to the local communities co-developing the specific solution.

8.5 Origin of the Funds

Selected applicants will sign a dedicated Sub-grant Agreement with the RURACTIVE consortium. The funds attached to the Sub-grant Agreement come directly from the funds of the RURACTIVE European project and therefore remain the property of the EC, whose management rights have been transferred to the project partners in RURACTIVE via the European Commission Grant Agreement no. 101084377.

As detailed in the Sub-Grant Agreement template, the relation between the sub-grantees and the EC through the RURACTIVE project carries a set of obligations to the sub-grantees. It is the task of the sub-grantees to respect them and of the RURACTIVE consortium partners to inform about them.

9. How is your data protected?

9.1 Data protection

To process and evaluate applications, the RURACTIVE consortium will need to collect Personal and Industrial Data. F6S Network Ireland Limited, as the Open Call Manager of the project, will act as Data Controller for data submitted through the F6S platform. Please see the privacy policy here. F6S Tech, as the RURACTIVE FSTP Treasurer, will also have access to this information.

A Data Protection Officer (DPO) has been appointed by F6S to ensure compliance with data protection regulations, such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and that personal data is collected, processed, and stored in a secure manner.

The F6S platform's system design and operational procedures ensure that data is managed in compliance with The General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR). Each applicant will accept the F6S terms to ensure coverage. Please refer here to review the F6S platform's privacy policy and data security policy.

Apart from the F6S platform, data will also be stored in the F6S SharePoint, and the project repository on SharePoint, managed by the University of Bologna - the RURACTIVE Project Coordinator.

The RURACTIVE consortium must retain generated data until five years after the balance of the RURACTIVE project is paid or longer if there are ongoing procedures (such as audits, investigations or litigations). In this case, the data must be kept until the end of the deployment of such procedures.

9.2 Confidentiality

The final list of the awarded projects and beneficiaries will be made public, including the name of the projects, abstract, legal name of the entity, type of entity, country of origin, and projects' results, duration, and budget.

During the implementation of the RURACTIVE Innovators Programme and for five years after the end of the programme activities, the beneficiary(ies) must keep confidential any data, documents, or other material (in any form) that is identified as confidential at sub-contract signature ('confidential information').

If a selected applicant requests, the EC and the RURACTIVE Consortium may agree to keep such information confidential for an additional period beyond the initial five years. This will be explicitly stated in the Sub-Grant Agreement.

If the information has been identified as confidential during the RURACTIVE programme or only orally, it will be considered to be confidential only if this is accepted by the RURACTIVE coordinator and confirmed in writing within 15 days of the oral disclosure. Unless otherwise agreed between the parties, they may use confidential information only to implement the Sub-Grant Agreement.

The selected beneficiary(ies) may disclose confidential information to the RURACTIVE Consortium and to the selected reviewers, who will be bound by a specific non-disclosure agreement.

10.   What are the most important links and contacts?

- More info about RURACTIVE: https://www.ruractive.eu/
- More info about the RURACTIVE Open Call for Innovators: https://www.ruractive.eu/open-call
- Apply via (Open call application form): https://www.f6s.com/ruractive-open-call-for-innovators/apply
- Online Q&A and discussion forum: https://www.f6s.com/ruractive-open-call-for-innovators/discuss
- Help desk: opencall@ruractive.eu
- F6S support team (for platform issues during the application): support@f6s.com

No binding information will be provided via any other means (e.g. phone calls).

Glossary of Terms and Definitions

This section describes the relevant terms that are used in the open call documentation. Unless otherwise stated, the definition of a term is the one stated in this section.

Table 11: Terms and definitions used in the RURACTIVE Open Call documentation

Term / Expression	Definition
Applicant	Organisation that intends to submit or has submitted an application to the Open Call for Innovators.
Eligibility Criteria	Criteria used to assess if an application can be considered for the Open Call for Innovators. Possible values are "Yes" or "No".
Application Eligible or Not Eligible	Application that is or is not compliant with eligibility criteria.
Beneficiary	An organisation that has submitted an application to the Open Call for Innovators and that has been accepted for funding and has signed the RURACTIVE Sub-Grant Agreement. It may also be referred to as Innovator or as Third-Party.
Consortium	Group of maximum two legal entities that are selected in the Open Call for Innovators and enter the RURACTIVE Innovators Programme.
(RURACTIVE) Consortium	Group of legal entities that are cumulatively responsible for implementing the RURACTIVE project as defined in the Grant Agreement number 101084377.
Contract Deadline	Date and time until when the selected innovators need to provide contractual information.
Cross-cutting priorities	Cutting-edge factors at the basis of rural sustainable transition, including Climate change adaptation and mitigation, Biodiversity, Social justice and inclusion.
Dynamos	Rural pilot areas in the RURACTIVE project (twelve in total at the project start), in which Innovators will test their solutions.
External Evaluator	An expert that has been invited by RURACTIVE to assist in the evaluation of the applications submitted to the Open Call. Experts cannot have conflicts of interest and are bound by their own

	confidentiality agreement.
F6S Application Form	Application form available on the F6S Platform.
F6S Platform	Platform provided by F6S where the innovators submit their application.
FSTP	Financial Support to Third Parties. Payments made to entities that apply to the Open Call and which are accepted in the RURACTIVE programme, and which in the RURACTIVE that are not members of the consortium.
FSTP – Lump Sum	Payment made to the third party based on the achievement of a milestone.
Innovators	Startups, SMEs, researchers and organisations applying to the RURACTIVE Open Call. Once selected, organisations will also be referred to as Innovators.
Open Call	Competitive process to access the direct funding provided to innovators by the RURACTIVE project to support the Dynamos.
Open Call Deadline	Date and time when applications close.
Open Call Selection	Rules used to order applications and select for funding.
Solutions	Place based established practices, processes, initiatives, models of governance, actions and products comprising one or a combination of various forms of innovations (digital and technological, technical, social, organisational and governance, financial and business models) that drive rural communities towards a sustainability transformation.
Reserve List	Eligible SMEs that will wait, per country, in case selected SMEs do not provide contractual data.
RURACTIVE Consortium	Group of legal entities that are cumulatively responsible for implementing the RURACTIVE project as defined in the Grant Agreement number 101084377.
Rural Development Drivers - RDD	Set of drivers that guide rural development, as defined by the RURACTIVE project.
Rural Innovation Ecosystems - RIE	Communities of people, places and practices that share interests in one or more specific RDDs to be established in Dynamos' areas.

SME	An incorporated enterprise that complies with the rules defined by the European Commission to be qualified as an SME (see section 5).
Third-Party	An organisation that has submitted an application to the Open Call for Innovators and that has been accepted for funding and has signed the RURACTIVE Sub-Grant Agreement. It may also be referred to as Innovator or as Beneficiary.
Threshold/ evaluation	Minimum score that a proposal must have to be considered for the next phase.