PoC Co-Financing Instrument Guidelines

EIT Food/ PoC Co-Financing Instrument/2026

EIT FOOD

Leuven, Belgium

17/08/2026

Version: 3/2026

eitfood.eu

Kommentiert [MC1]: to amend

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Call Fact Sheet

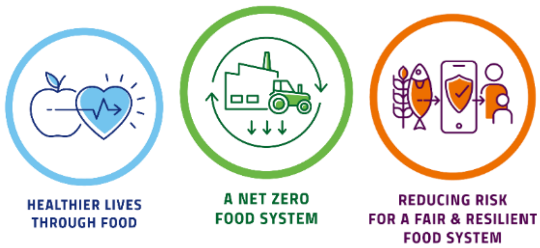
Title of Call	PoC Co-Financing Instrument
Objective and Scope	Promote Startup-Corporate collaboration
Call Deadline	Cutoff date 1: 31/07/2026 12:00 CET Cutoff date 2: 30/09/2026 12:00 CET Cutoff date 2: 30/10/2026 12:00 CET Cutoff date 3: 30/11/2026 12:00 CET Submitted applications will be evaluated by expert panels after each cutoff date
Available Funding	The maximum allocation to this call is €1.500.000 with up to 60.000€ available per project
Project Duration	1-12 months
How to apply	Application submission via [MyEITFood Portal]
Contact Information	Christoph Mandl: Christoph.mandl@eitfood.eu

1. Introduction

EIT Food is the world's largest food innovation community, creating connections right across the food system. Supported by the European Union (EU), we invest in projects, organisations and individuals which share our goals for a healthy and sustainable food system.

We have built a unique not-for-profit business to carry out transformative programmes in skills, education, entrepreneurship, start-up investment and communications. We deliver these programmes in partnership with our members to create a culture and build a community which sees the long-term value in the food innovation we fund.

Our Missions



EIT Food´s Missions respond to major societal challenges within the food system. The alignment of our chosen challenges towards United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and EU policy is detailed in our main funding strategy document agreed with EIT (European Institute of Innovation & Technology). For more about our Missions-led approach please visit our website.

2. Purpose and scope of PoC Co-Financing Instrument

EIT Food facilitates corporate innovation by connecting world-leading industry with impactful agrifood startups. The purpose of the PoC Co-Financing Instrument is to financially de-risk the commercial activities of agrifood startups that will ultimately result in impactful technologies, products, and services reaching the market and scaling further in the food sector.

Usually, the first step towards a long-term collaboration between a startup and a potential corporate customer is a proof-of concept or small-scale pilot project. Once this kind of experiment was deemed successful from both sides, it will ideally lead to a bigger scale pilot project or the start of commercial activities. The extra support that EIT Food can offer at this stage is to financially de-risk startup-corporate experiments in an attempt to promote the commercial success of their solutions.

In this context, EIT Food targets proof-of-concepts and small-scale pilot projects between startups and prospective corporate clients with less than €60.000 in project costs. Proposed projects must exhibit a clear pathway towards commercial success. Project activities should therefore be strictly related to deliver on the proof-of-concept or pilot project proposed together with the corporate client. Example projects include but are not limited to: Sample creation, field trials, functionality and property tests, & efficiency assessments.

3. Key Performance Indicators (KPI) and Deliverables

3.1. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

All **EIT Food funded** projects should achieve relevant Core Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). For the PoC co-financing instrument, the main KPI is:

Code	KPI	KPI Definition
EITHE02.4	**Marketed Innovations launched into the market**	Number of innovations introduced on the market during the KAVA duration or within 3 years after completion with a sales revenue of at least 10 000 EUR documented

Please note: At the end of the funding period, EIT Food requires specific structured data and documentation to verify the achievement of KPIs. Grantees must report their KPI achievements through the grant management tool and ensure that all required structured data and supporting evidence is submitted in accordance with the guidelines provided (see EIT Food KPI Guidance Document for details).

3.2. Deliverables and Milestones

Grant recipients must submit final deliverables at the end of the implementation period. For this activity the deliverables include:

- Deliverable 1: Proof of Concept Progress Report (expected earliest: Month 1. Latest month 12 from project start date).

Grant recipients have obligations on communication, dissemination and visibility rules. Please see Article 17 of the Model Grant Agreement and EIT Food's Brand Guidelines.

Grant recipients must adhere to EIT Food Intellectual Property´s (IP) Policy which complies with the IP provisions outlined in Article 16 of the Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement.

Kommentiert [MC2]: @Christoph which deliverable would you expect here? I suggest mid-term report, something general considering the broad scope of the call, that can be used to trigger the second payment

Kommentiert [MC3]: @Christoph Selected entities receive 50% in pre-financing. As soon as they meet the deliverable, they get paid the remaining 50% of the project. In your project, is it reasonable applicants are paid mid-way? (e.g. if startups ok to pay them in advance).

After having a second thought, I think EIT may consider *mid-term report* too vague. Could we say: Proof of Concept Technical & Market Validation Report?

Kommentiert [MC4R3]: I've added: Latest month 12 from project start date - to give flexibility and set a deadline, which is the end of the project

Kommentiert [MC5]: @Christoph this is contradictory and may cause confusion. Can we say: *expected achievement date month 12* to ensure consistency with the first sentence?

Kommentiert [MC6]: to amend

4. Eligibility

The PoC Co-Financing Instrument is addressed to **a mono-beneficiary**, therefore proposals must be submitted by one single entity only. Proposals with multiple beneficiaries will be deemed ineligible.

Only submissions involving a corporate client counterpart with a minimum annual turnover of EUR 1,000,000,000 (one billion euros), based on the latest approved annual financial statements, shall be considered eligible.

Corporate counterparts with annual turnover below EUR 1,000,000,000 may only be considered eligible under specific circumstances, namely where they can clearly demonstrate established and verifiable open innovation capabilities. Such capability must be evidenced through documented open innovation programmes, structured collaboration frameworks with startups or scaleups, dedicated innovation units, corporate venture activities, or other formalised mechanisms that demonstrate the organisational capacity to effectively implement and scale Proof-of-Concept projects.

EIT Food reserves the right to assess and determine whether the demonstrated open innovation capability sufficiently meets the eligibility requirement.

All submitted applications will undergo an eligibility check to advance to the evaluation stage, according to the evaluation criteria below.

During the eligibility check, should EIT Food identify obvious application or technical errors in a proposal, the applicant may be given the opportunity to correct or resubmit their proposal within three (3) calendar days following proper communication from EIT Food. Such errors may include system malfunctions, typos, or missing supporting documents.

Please read Annex 1 carefully, in addition to the following eligibility criteria:

Organisation Eligibility	Each implementing participant must:
	• Be a legally incorporated entity in one of the EU or Horizon Europe eligible countries for a minimum of 12 months of business activity. • Have a technology, product, service, or solution aligned to one of the three EIT Food Missions. • Be either i) a SMALL sized company as defined in the EU recommendation 2003/361 (less than 49 employees and less than 10 million in turnover or balance sheet), or ii) a MICRO sized company as defined in the EU recommendation 2003/361 (less than 10 employees, and less than 2 million in turnover or balance sheet). • Provide a PIC Number: https://www.eitfood.eu/files/PIC-Guidance.pdf
Application Eligibility	To be eligible, applications must:

	• Be complete, with all mandatory supporting documents, including:
	  ○ Signed LoI between corporate client and EIT Food ivzw detailing the PoC co-financing instrument terms and conditions (see templates on the call website)
	  ○ A company presentation (i.e., pitch deck), outlining the commercial capacity and capabilities of your company

	as well as the readiness of your proposed product or solution for market entry / expansion ○ A project plan outlining the milestones and activities to achieve project completion (i.e., marketed innovation) ○ A budget plan outlining the expected costs for the proposed project scope, including co-funding ratio (the template can be found in the call page). • Be submitted on time via the submission platform. • Be fully written in English.

Kommentiert [MC7]: Let's attach the template to the call page.
The link used redirects to our internal intranet.

@Christoph Mandl

An applicant will be deemed ineligible if they are a beneficiary in an EIT Food funded project in 2026, conducting similar testing or marketing activities for the similar technological solution in a similar geographical market with the same legal entities involved, ensuring that there is no double charging of costs.

Please note, you are not required to be an EIT Food partner to submit a proposal, or to receive funding under this call.

5. Funding

The total budget for this call is a maximum of €1.500.000. Applicants can submit more than one project with different corporate clients. Beneficiaries will receive a subgrant to fund their cost. The project can start from September 2026 and last up to a maximum of 12 months of funding from the start date. The maximum funding available for that period per application is €60.000.

There is a 6 million EUR limit per participants from Member States of the European Union (EU) and from Horizon Europe Associate Countries for the whole 3-year Grant Agreement. Legal entities from non- Horizon Europe Associate countries can participate in consortia but are limited to funding of 60 000 over 3 years for a Grant Agreement. This funding is implemented under GA 101269771. In those limits are included all the EIT Funding awarded to an organization across all the activities and prizes for the 3-year grant agreement.

The Subgrant is based on project-based lump sum and value for money. All costs, including co-funding, need to comply with Horizon Europe regulations regarding the eligibility of expenses. Please refer to Article 6 of the Model Grant Agreement and the Annotated Model Grant Agreement.

The total lump sum contribution will be disbursed in two instalments: The first instalment is due upon signature of the lump sum agreement. The second instalment is conditional upon the delivery of the project deliverable mentioned below. Each deliverable is associated with proportional cost allocation and deduction rate. In cases where deliverables are not completed or only partially fulfilled, a deduction will be applied up to the amount associated with the incomplete deliverable.

Deliverable 1:

- Allocated Value: up to 60,000€ (100% of the lump sum)

Delivery date: Earliest Month 1 and latest Month 12 from project start date

5.1. Financial Sustainability

To ensure financial sustainability of the programme, the corporate counterpart of a Proof-of-Concept project must enter into a separate agreement with EIT Food, committing to a fee that covers part of the EIT Food Proof-of-Concept programme costs. This fee amounts to 60% of the project budget submitted by the startup they are supporting.

Kommentiert [MC8]: @Christoph good morning! EIT has approved the guidelines, asking this change, as per our discussion.

Ok from your side? Anything you would like to add here? Thank you!

Kommentiert [CM9R8]: @Mariana Gomes de Carvalho If EIT is happy with this and you are, so am I :)

5.2. Payment schedule

The lump sum contribution will be disbursed in instalments. The first instalment comes as pre-financing and represents 50% of the total budget. A second instalment will be transferred upon successful completion of Deliverable 1.

Each deliverable is associated with proportional cost allocation and deduction rate. In cases where deliverables are not completed or only partially fulfilled, a deduction will be applied up to the amount associated with the incomplete deliverable.

Please note: the amount and timing of funding is dependent on the dispersal of funds to EIT Food from the EIT.

5.3. EIT Food Legal Framework & Legal Documents to be signed

Selected applicants will receive a second communication with instructions regarding the completion of the following document, as well as agreeing to EIT Food´s conflict of interest policy.

Lump Sum Agreement: document that outlines the conditions of the financial support provided (see template on call website).

6. Timeline and Application

6.1 Timeline

This funding opportunity follows the timeline below:

Call Open Date	16.04.2026
Call Deadline	Cutoff date 1: 31/07/2026 12:00 CET Cutoff date 2: 30/09/2026 12:00 CET Cutoff date 2: 30/10/2026 12:00 CET Cutoff date 3: 30/11/2026 12:00 CET
Evaluation	Within 15 days after submission
Communication to selected participants	Within 30 days after submission
Standstill period, Onboarding, Validation and Contracting	30 days
Indicative start of project implementation	Flexible start – latest start date April, 2027

Kommentiert [MC10]: @Christoph can you amend to April 16?
If you build the application form today, we can test tomorrow and already share with the website team for publication 48 before publishing as per their request.

The standstill period is a set time after funding selection for appeals, final administrative checks, and compliance in the award process. The project cannot start before this period. The standstill period of 30 days applies to this call.

6.2 Application Submission

Applications must be submitted via MyEITFood Portal, no later than the call deadline.

The application form must be completed and submitted by the application deadline of **30 November 2026 – 12:00 CET**. It must be submitted via the application portal, which requires previous registration before submission. **Please allow sufficient time prior to submitting your application to register.**

7. Evaluation and Selection Process

All submitted applications will undergo an eligibility check and evaluation to determine their feasibility and suitability for funding. The evaluation will be conducted by a minimum of 2 external evaluators, based on the criteria below. All evaluators have been selected in an open and transparent process. All evaluators, both internal and external, are trained extensively on the **European Union´s Code of Conduct for Evaluators**, namely on the importance of transparency, fair treatment of all applicants, confidentiality and how to avoid conflict of interest. Evaluators must contractually agree to recuse themselves in the event of a conflict of interest. EIT Food aims for representation of either women or men not falling below 40% as a parity threshold within evaluation committees.

The following criteria and weighting will be used in the assessment:

Criteria	Sub criteria	Score
Excellence (35%)	- Traction & milestone achievements - Problem-Solution-Fit - Collaboration experience of corporate client	1 - 5
Impact (35%)	- Alignment with EIT Food missions - Technology Novelty - Ability of the PoC co-financing instrument in accelerating the applicant's commercial success	1 - 5
Quality and efficiency of the implementation (30%)	- Scalability / Feasibility of Implementation - Resource Utilization / Cost Efficiency - Quality of Deliverables	1 - 5

Kommentiert [MC11]: @Christoph I assume you are missing strategic fit (internal assessment)? the percentages sum to 75% at the moment.

Each evaluation sub-criterion will be scored from 1 to 5 using the following scoring system.

The quality threshold for selection is a total weighted score of 3.5.

Score		Description
1	Poor	The criterion is inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses
2	Fair	Application broadly addresses the criterion but there are significant weaknesses
3	Good	Application addresses the criterion well, but a number of shortcomings are present
4	Very good	Application addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present
5	Excellent	Application successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.

Proposals will be selected if they meet the quality threshold (i.e. weighted score of 3.5) until the funding is exhausted.

All applicants will be alerted in writing to the outcome of their proposal.

The recipients of EIT Funding must take all measures to promote equal opportunities between men and women in the implementation of the action and, where applicable, in line with the gender equality plan. They must aim, to the extent possible, for a gender balance at all levels of personnel assigned to the action, including at supervisory and managerial level.

7.1 Appeal on Evaluation Results

They can submit an appeal within 15 days of receiving their result, if:

- The evaluation of their proposal has not been carried out in accordance with the procedures set out in this document.

For more details, please refer to EIT Food Redress guidance.

8. Monitoring

The PoC co-financing instrument will be monitored regularly and may be audited.

All Activities selected for funding undergo continuous monitoring by EIT Food to ensure effective progress and implementation at each stage in accordance with the Project Agreement. The monitoring will cover several aspects relating to the Activity implementation including but not limited to achievement of deliverables and KPIs; risk management; financial management; quality assurance; progress against KPI achievement and impact delivery; communication and dissemination (in compliance with MGA Article 17); and progress towards commercialisation and exploitation of results.

EIT Food will request the reporting of KPIs and deliverables, together with the supporting documentation

In the case of under-performance, significant delay of implementation, misconduct, or any other reason jeopardizing the timely implementation of the Activity identified during the monitoring process, EIT Food reserves the right to discontinue or restructure the funding of the Activity at any point during the Activity duration.

Furthermore, EIT Food will monitor all Activities up to 5 years after Activity completion to ensure the achievement of KPIs anticipated after Activity end.

9. Administrative Items

Entities that have never been part of projects funded by the EIT and that do not have a PIC validated by the Research Executive Agency (REA) of the European Commission will be subject to a PIC validation process managed by the EIT Community Onboarding Service, where they might be required to provide additional documentation and to sign a Declaration of Honor (DoH).

As part of the onboarding process, selected entities must:

- Register on EIT Food grants management platform.
- Sign and submit the Declaration of Size.
- Sign and submit the Financial Identification Form.

Additionally, EIT Food reserves the right to request the EIT Community Onboarding Service a Financial Assessment Capacity to check the financial capacity of any entity of a selected proposal. If the assessment results are not satisfactory, the EIT Food might reject the participation of this entity and will then check whether the proposal is still eligible.

For further information on the project implementation, please read the EIT Food Activity Implementation Guidelines for Participants.

10. Support

For technical assistance please contact support@eitfood.eu. For any other questions about this call that has not been addressed in this guidelines or annexes, please contact Christoph Mandl christoph.mandl@eitfood.eu.

Please visit our website for information about upcoming events to support your application. You will also find our list of Frequently Asked Questions.

ANNEX 1: Eligibility

Please Note:

1. Failing any of the above call specific criteria will make your application ineligible. If an applicant is ineligible, the participant will be informed.

2. According to EU policies and measures, Russian entities will not be authorised to participate in any new grant under the EU Research and Innovation programmes. This ban applies not only to their potential participation as beneficiaries, but to their potential participation in any kind of role: beneficiaries, linked third parties/affiliated entities, subcontractors, in-kind contributors, international partners/associated partners, and third parties receiving financial support. Find the full statement from the European Commission here.

3. Pursuant to Article 2 (2) of the Decision 2022/2506 of 15 December 2022 on measures for the protection of the Union budget against breaches of the principles of the rule of law in Hungary *where the Commission implements the Union budget in direct or indirect management pursuant to of Article 62(1) points (a) and (c), of Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046, **no legal commitments shall be entered into with any public interest trust established on the basis of the Hungarian Act IX of 2021 or any entity maintained by such a public interest trust**.* This prohibition applies to financial support to third parties (sub-grants and prizes), hence the proposal of any entity or group of entities where a Participant is included in the list of public interest trusts shall be considered as not eligible.

4. Applicants will be deemed ineligible if:

a. bankrupt, subject to insolvency or winding-up procedures, where its assets are being administered by a liquidator or by a court, where it is in an arrangement with creditors, where its business Activities are suspended, or where it is in any analogous situation arising from a similar procedure provided for under national laws or regulations;

b. it has been established by a final judgment or a final administrative decision that the organisation is in breach of its obligations relating to the payment of taxes or social security contributions in accordance with the applicable law;

c. it has been established by a final judgment or a final administrative decision that the organisation is guilty of grave professional misconduct by having violated applicable laws or regulations or ethical standards of the profession to which the organisation belongs, or by having engaged in any wrongful conduct which has an impact on its professional credibility where such conduct denotes a wrongful intent or gross negligence;

d. is found to be attempting to influence the decision-making process of the call during the process;

e. attempting to obtain confidential information that may confer upon its undue advantages in the call process;

f. it has been established by a final judgment that the organisation is guilty of fraud, corruption or money laundering.

ANNEX 2 - History of Changes

Kommentiert [MC12]: @Christoph Mandl

Version	Publication Date	Changes
2/2026	29/04/2026	Amendment of Deliverable 1
3/2026	17/08/2026	Amendment of cutoff dates