



Sustainable Blue
Economy Partnership

Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership

Call for Experts for the Third Joint Transnational Co-Funded Call: Project (Pre)Proposal Evaluation

*Digitalisation and Innovation for Resilient Marine Ecosystems,
Businesses, and Communities to Strengthen the EU Blue
Economy's Competitiveness*

SBEP Call 2025

Call launch: 29 September 2025

Submission platform: [Click here](#)

Third Joint Transnational co-funded Call: [Funding opportunities | Bluepartnership](#)

Submission deadline: 17 November 2025, 15.00 CET

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2025 Call for Experts for the Joint Transnational Co-Funded Call

Title of the SBEP third Joint Call (2025): *Digitalisation and Innovation for Resilient Marine Ecosystems, Businesses, and Communities to Strengthen the EU Blue Economy's Competitiveness*

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1. CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVE OF THE CALL

The Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership (SBEP, hereafter ‘the Partnership’) is a Research and Innovation (R&I) Partnership started in 2022 under the Horizon Europe Programme, and is part of the Cluster 6 (Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment). The vision of the Partnership is to design, steer and support a just and inclusive transition to regenerative, resilient, and sustainable blue economy. It aims to boost the transformation needed towards a climate-neutral, sustainable, productive, and competitive blue economy by 2030 while creating and supporting the conditions for a sustainable ocean for the people by 2050.

Composed of 30 countries, it pledges to leverage sustainable solutions to boost the green and digital transitions of economic activities related to the regional sea basins bordering the EU, namely the Atlantic Ocean, the Baltic Sea, the Black sea, the Mediterranean Sea and the North Sea.

The 2025 Joint Transnational co-funded Call (hereafter, 2025 SBEP Joint Call) is the third Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership call, bringing together financial resources at both national and regional levels, facilitated by 37 Participating Funding Organisations (PFOs) from 28 countries, with combined contribution from the European Union.

The Call is entitled “**Digitalisation and Innovation for Resilient Marine Ecosystems, Businesses, and Communities to Strengthen the EU Blue Economy Competitiveness**” and encompasses the five priority areas as follows¹:

- **Priority area 1:** *Digital Twins of the Ocean (DTOs) at sub-basin scale*
- **Priority area 2:** *Transitioning the blue economy sectors, and the development of the marine multi-use infrastructures*

¹ The Priority Areas of the SBEP Third Joint Transnational co-funded Call stem from the Intervention Areas of the Partnership, which link the high level SRIA ([Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda](#)) and the practical implementation through R&I calls and activities. They provide actionable routes and concrete steps to approach the range of challenges, tensions, and opportunities that the Blue Economy is facing.

- **Priority area 3:** *Climate-Smart Planning and managing sea-uses at the regional scale*
- **Priority area 4:** *Blue Bioresources; sustainable fisheries and aquaculture, and new bio-based products*
- **Priority area 5:** *Resilient Coastal Communities and Businesses*

Each of these areas contributes directly to one or more of the Ocean Decade Challenges², supporting actionable knowledge generation, policy uptake, capacity development, and inclusive innovation in the blue economy context.

The Joint Call consists in a two-step process. Consortium coordinators must submit a pre-proposal in the first step and, if invited by the Call Steering Committee³ (CSC), must submit a full proposal in the second step. Pre-proposals and full proposals submitted under this Call must address one of the Priority Areas mentioned above.

Under the Call for Experts of the 2025 SBEP Joint Call, **the Partnership is looking for experts to conduct the scientific evaluations of the proposals submitted under the first and second steps.** The selected evaluators are expected to have a high level of expertise and experience in one or more of the Priority Areas of the Call.

All applicants are recommended to read the the Call Text of the 2025 SBEP Joint Call⁴ ([Funding opportunities | Bluepartnership](#)) for, notably, the full explanation of the Call context and objectives, the call process and a detailed description of the Priority Areas.

² [10 Challenges - Ocean Decade](#)

³ The Call Steering Committee is the funding and decision body of the SBEP 2025 Joint Call.

⁴ [Funding opportunities | Bluepartnership](#)

2. OVERVIEW OF THE THIRD JOINT TRANSNATIONAL CO-FUNDED CALL

2.1 (Pre)proposal submission

Pre-proposals and full proposals are submitted on the online submission tool (EPSS⁵), by the Consortium Coordinators.

STEP 1 (pre-proposal step)

The Consortium Coordinator must submit a pre-proposal on behalf of the consortium, providing key data on the proposed project. The deadline for the submission of the pre-proposal is **17/11/2025, 15.00 CET** (Brussels time). Submission of pre-proposals is mandatory; it is not possible to enter the procedure at a later stage.

STEP 2 (full proposal step)

The Consortium Coordinator must submit a full proposal (upon invitation) on behalf of the consortium. The deadline for full proposal submission is **17/06/2026, 15.00 CET** (Brussels time). Deadline to be confirmed after Step 1.

2.2 Eligibility checks

All pre-proposals and full proposals must meet the general eligibility criteria, checked by the Joint Call Secretariat⁶, and national/regional eligibility criteria, checked by the relevant funding organisations according to their specific criteria. The eligibility criteria are detailed in the Call Text paragraph 4.6.1 and 4.6.2.

Proposals that don't fulfil the eligibility criteria will be declined without further review, i.e. they will not be sent for scientific evaluations and not be considered for funding.

The proposals that fulfil the requirements, will enter the evaluation process.

⁵ [SBEP EPSS](#)

⁶ The Joint Call Secretariat (JCS) assists in coordinating the call procedure, including the eligibility checks and evaluations, and is responsible for all practical aspects of the call.

2.3 Evaluation process

The evaluation process applies to both the first and second step.

Through the Call for Experts, the The CSC will establish an international evaluation committee (IEC). The composition of evaluation committees will consider the gender and geographical balance.

The IEC will comprise international scientific experts from the relevant research areas covered in the 2025 SBEP Joint Call. The IEC composition should cover, as far as possible, the range of priority areas of the present 2025 SBEP Joint Call.

All eligible proposals will be subject to a scientific evaluation by at least two IEC members in step 1 and three IEC members in step 2. They must assess the proposal and prepare individual written evaluation reports, in advance of the IEC meeting. For each proposal, one of the two IEC members (or three IEC members in step 2) will be nominated as a rapporteur.

During the IEC meeting, the evaluation results for each proposal will be presented by the evaluators. The IEC will discuss the proposals, agree on the final score for each criterion and the overall score for each proposal and establish the final ranking of proposals based exclusively on the set of criteria defined.

The decisions of the IEC should be taken collectively, preferably by consensus or by a simple majority of the panel members in case consensus cannot be reached. The rapporteur will produce a final Evaluation Summary Report of the proposal on behalf of the IEC, which will be transmitted to the applicants (without scores).

2.3.1.1 Scientific evaluation step 1

The evaluation of each pre-proposal will be based on the following criteria:

- ▶ ***Excellence (Threshold: 3/5)***
- ▶ ***Impact (Threshold: 3/5)***

During the IEC meeting, the evaluators will present the evaluation results of each pre-proposal. The IEC will discuss pre-proposals and agree on the final scores for each criterion.

The final overall score will be calculated by summing up the agreed upon scores by the IEC of the two criteria. A ranking list of pre-proposals will be produced, including only pre-proposals that meet the minimum threshold, *i.e.*, 3 out of 5 in each criterion.

2.3.1.2 Scientific evaluation step 2

The evaluation of each full proposal will be based on the following criteria:

- ▶ ***Excellence (Threshold: 3/5)***
- ▶ ***Impact (Threshold: 3/5)***
- ▶ ***Quality and efficiency of implementation (Threshold: 3/5)***

During the IEC meeting, the evaluators will present the evaluation results of each proposal. The IEC will discuss full proposals and agree on the final scores for each criterion.

The final overall scores will be calculated by summing up the agreed upon scores by the IEC of the three criteria.

The threshold on the final score is 10/15: no project with a lower score will be funded.

The final ranking list will be produced based on the final scores, including only full proposals that meet the minimum threshold, *i.e.*, 3 out of 5 in each criterion, and threshold on the final score *i.e.*, 10 out of 15.

2.4 Scoring criteria and system

The evaluation criteria (and sub-criteria) used by the IEC are those used for Horizon Europe proposals⁷.

⁷ General Annex D of the HE Work Programme: https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/wp-call/2023-2024/wp-13-general-annexes_horizon-2023-2024_en.pdf

2.4.1.1 Scoring criteria

CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION	THRESHOLD
Excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ <i>Clarity and pertinence of the project's objectives, and the extent to which the proposed work is ambitious and goes beyond the state of the art.</i> ▶ <i>Soundness of the proposed: overall methodology, including the underlying concepts, models, assumptions, inter-disciplinary approaches, appropriate consideration of the gender dimension in research and innovation content, and the quality of open science practices, including sharing and management of research outputs and engagement of citizens, civil society and end-users where appropriate.</i> 	3/5
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ <i>Credibility of the pathways to achieve the expected outcomes and impacts specified in the work programme, and the likely scale and significance of the contributions from the project.</i> ▶ <i>Suitability and quality of the measures to maximise expected outcomes and impacts, as set out in the dissemination and exploitation plan, including communication activities.</i> 	3/5
Quality and efficiency of the implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ <i>Quality and effectiveness of the work plan, assessment of risks, and appropriateness of the effort assigned to work packages, and the resources overall.</i> ▶ <i>Capacity and role of each participant, and the extent to which the consortium as a whole brings together the necessary expertise.</i> 	3/5

Evaluators will identify strengths and weaknesses (if any) and provide context for their comments based on the application, *i.e.*, evaluators will be asked to score (pre-) proposals as they were submitted, rather than on their potential if certain changes were to be made. When an evaluator identifies substantial shortcomings, he/she must reflect this by awarding a lower score for the criterion concerned. There should be consistency between the numerical scores and written comments.

2.4.1.2 Scoring system

0 – LIMITED - The (pre-)proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information.

1 – POOR - The criterion is inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.

2 – FAIR - The (pre-)proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses.

3 – GOOD - The (pre-)proposal addresses the criterion well, but several shortcomings are present.

4 – VERY GOOD - The (pre-)proposal addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present.

5 – EXCELLENT - The (pre-)proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.

3. INTERNATIONAL EVALUATION COMMITTEE MEMBERS ROLE

3.1 Your role as an IEC member

As a member of the International Evaluation Committee of the third Joint Call (2025) of the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership, your role will be to:

(i) Read the (pre)proposal assigned to you and to provide a written evaluation report using exclusively the set evaluation criteria (see paragraph 2.4);

(ii) Participate and present your (pre)proposal evaluation results in IEC meetings (February 2026 in Step 1, date yet to be confirmed). Please note that presence to the IEC meetings is mandatory;

(iii) Discuss, with the IEC Panel, (pre)proposals according to the set evaluation criteria. The goal of the IEC Panel is to reach a consensus on the scores, and on generic feedback (= evaluation summary report) to be sent to Consortium Coordinators. The Rapporteur has the responsibility to write the evaluation summary report (ESR) on behalf of the IEC Panel. The Chair/Co-Chair validate the ESR.

(iv) Deliver on the last day of the IEC meeting, a ranking of (pre)proposals validated by the IEC. The ranking list is solely based on the agreed upon scores by the IEC Panel.

3.2 Compensation

Each IEC member will receive a fee of 50 EUR for each pre-proposal and 100 EUR for each full proposal reviewed. Each IEC member will receive a fee at each step that is fixed to a standard rate of 250 EUR for the attendance to meetings (Online in Step 1 and possibly on-site in Step 2). Attendance to IEC meetings is mandatory for the selected experts. In addition, the travel costs, accommodation, and meals for attending the IEC meetings (if physical ones) will be covered by the Partnership.

4. CALL FOR EXPERTS

4.1 Selection procedure

The process of establishing the International Evaluation Committee for the Joint Call 2025 is launched by the Partnership through the Call for Experts.

The Call for Experts consists in a single step submission process and is overseen by the CSC with the support of the Call Secretariat. The deadline to submit an application is November 17th 2025 (15:00 CET). Any applications submitted after this deadline will not be reviewed.

The Call Secretariat will conduct an eligibility assessment of the submitted applications based on the eligibility criteria defined in 4.2.

Based on the eligibility criteria and the content of the pre and full proposals submitted under the Joint Call, the Call Secretariat will present to the CSC a list of experts, deemed eligible, to participate as IEC members, highlighting gender and geographical balance.

Experts selected as IEC members for step 1 (pre-proposal evaluation) will be invited by the Call Secretariat on behalf of the CSC to participate in the Call.

Based on the pre-proposal evaluation process and the content of the full proposals submitted in step 2, experts from Step 1 will be invited by the Call Secretariat on behalf of the CSC to participate in the full proposal evaluation step (step 2) of the Call. No further Call for Experts will be launched for the full proposal step.

All applicants will be contacted directly by email following November 17th.

4.2 Eligibility criteria

Applicants must fulfil the following eligibility criteria. Applicants that don't meet all the eligibility criteria will be declined without review by the CSC.

- *Proficiency or fluent in written and spoken English;*
- *Relevant expertise and experience in the fields related to the sustainable ocean economy;*
- *Expertise and experience relevant to one or more priority areas of the Joint Call (see paragraph 1.);*
- *Availability for the pre-proposal step IEC meeting (please note this is a two full-day meeting held on **Central European Time** and online in February 2026);*
- *Compliance to the code of conduct (see paragraph 6.);*
- *Not be involved in the pre and full proposals in any capacity.*

4.3 How to apply

Applicants are requested to submit their application through the online survey which can be found on the SBEP website ([Application Survey](#)).

In the application, the area of expertise and experience should be clearly stated.

The Partnership reserves the right to request any further evidence it deems fit and relevant to verify the fulfilment of the above-mentioned eligibility criteria.

All application submissions are treated as confidential.

5. TIMELINE

DATE	EVENT
21 July 2025	Joint Call pre-announcement
15 September 2025	Joint Call official launch – Call Publication
6 October 2025	International webinar for the applicants
29 September 2025	Call for Experts official launch

17 November 2025; 15.00 CET	Call for Experts submission deadline
<i>17 November 2025, 15.00 CET</i>	<i>Joint Call submission deadline (pre-proposals)</i>
18 November 2025 to mid-March 2026	Step 1: eligibility checks (JCS, and National Contact Points (NCPs), evaluation by the IEC, selection by the CSC
February 2026 (date to be confirmed)	IEC meeting (online)
Mid-March 2026	Communication of the results of the pre-proposal eligibility check and evaluation outcomes to project Coordinators. Invitation to submit full-proposals.
Mid-March to Early April 2026	Period for the redress procedure
Early April to mid-April 2026	Evaluation of the redress requests and communication of decisions to applicants
Step 2: Full proposal submission, eligibility, evaluation, and selection	
<i>17 June 2026, 15:00 CET</i>	<i>Deadline for submission (full proposals)</i>
18 June 2026 to end October 2026	Step 2: eligibility checks (JCS, and NCPs), evaluation by the IEC, selection by the CSC
September 2026 (date to be confirmed)	IEC meeting (on-site, tbc)
End-October 2026	Communication of the results of the full proposal eligibility check and evaluation outcomes to project Coordinators.
Early-November to Mid-November 2026	Period for the redress procedure
Mid-November to End-November 2026	Evaluation of the redress requests and communication of decisions to applicants
National/regional grant negotiations for the projects recommended for funding	
December 2026 to June 2027	Projects' start

Dec 2029/Jan 2030 to June 2030	Projects' end (at month 36)
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6. CONFLICT OF INTEREST, CONFIDENTIALITY, AND NON-DISCLOSURE POLICY

The Partnership is committed to avoiding any Conflict of Interest (COIs) and safeguarding good scientific practice. A **Code of Conduct related to Conflict of Interests, confidentiality and non-disclosure** is defined and applies to the CSC, the independent observer, **the IEC members**, the representative(s) from the DCU IOC/UNESCO, and the Ethics Experts. An important aspect of this code is the avoidance of any conflicts between personal interests and the interests of the applicants. The CSC and related National Contact Points (NCPs), the independent observer, **and the IEC** will perform their work impartially and take all measures to prevent any situation where the impartial and objective implementation of the work is compromised for reasons involving economic interest, political or national affinity, family or emotional ties or any other shared interest ('conflict of interests').

The following situations will automatically be considered as a conflict of interest:

- ▶ *Being involved in (the preparation of) any pre- and/or full proposal;*
- ▶ *Having submitted a proposal as a principal investigator or a team member, under the call;*
- ▶ *Being director, trustee or partner or in any way involved in the management of an applicant;*
- ▶ *Being employed or contracted by one of the applicants;*
- ▶ *Having close professional proximity, e.g., being a member of the same scientific institution with a hierarchical or department relation or impending change of the IEC member to the institution of the applicant in a position with a hierarchical or department relation or vice versa;*
- ▶ *Having close family ties (spouse, domestic or non-domestic partner, child, sibling, parent etc.) or other close personal relationships with the applicants of the proposal;*
- ▶ *Having (or have had during the last five years) a close scientific collaboration with an applicant of the proposal;*
- ▶ *Having (or have had) a relationship of scientific rivalry or professional hostility with an applicant of the proposal;*
- ▶ *Having (or have had), a mentor/mentee relationship with a principal investigator of the proposal;*
- ▶ *Having a current or prior (past 5 years) activity in advisory bodies of the applicant's institution, e.g., scientific advisory boards;*

- ▶ *Having direct or indirect benefit if any proposal submitted is accepted or rejected;*
- ▶ *Having personal economic interests in the funding decision. Other situations preventing the IEC members or reviewers from participating in the evaluation impartially could be considered a conflict of interest and should be reported as such by the IEC members.*

Please note that IEC members can be involved in cases of conflict of interest (as listed above). However, applicants included in a (pre- or full) proposal submitted to this call (including all the team members) must not serve as IEC members.

At the implementation level, the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership Consortium partners that might apply to the co-funded calls are completely excluded from the work of call preparation, selection and project follow-up and monitoring. All related information is kept non-accessible to these Consortium members. In that way, the possibility for research units belonging to these organisations to participate in the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership calls for proposals is safeguarded.

It is mandatory for all selected experts to read, accept and sign a conflict of interest, confidentiality, and non-disclosure declaration before the evaluation of the proposals.

7. PUBLISHABLE INFORMATION

The list of IEC members will be published at the end of the Joint Call process (2025) (once the projects have been selected) on the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership website. Therefore, applicants should be aware that the following information from the projects may be published by the Partnerships: (1) First and last name, (2) affiliated organisation.

8. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

The partnership applies the EU policy of equal opportunities and accepts applications without distinction on the grounds of age, race, political, philosophical or religious conviction, gender or sexual orientation and regardless of disabilities, material status or family situation.

9. PRIVACY POLICY

By applying, the applicants agree to the use, share (for specific purposes: e.g. selection process, evaluation, for future expert nominations, Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership-specific communication) and the storage of information according to the Partnership Privacy Policy and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The Online Submission Tool presents further information on the Privacy Policy (<https://proposals.etag.ee/sustainable-blue>).



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