
Sustainable Blue
Economy Partnership
ROLLING TRANSNATIONAL ACCESS CALL TO RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURES
Enabling pan-European access to marine and maritime Research Infrastructures to foster innovation, capacity building and the transition towards a sustainable blue economy
Co-funded by the European Union
EUROPEAN PARTNERSHIP

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Status: Public

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Publication: Open from 20 February 2026 until 29 February 2028 with cut off every four months

Version	Person Organisation	Date
1	MUR	10 November 2025
2	MUR, EC, ETAG	10 December 2025
3	MUR, ETAG	22 June 2026
4	MUR, INGV, RiS Providers	October 2026
5	MUR	November 2026

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TRANSNATIONAL ACCESS CALL TO RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURES ROLLING CALL, IN BRIEF

NOTICE: This Transnational Access (TA) Call to Research Infrastructures (RIs) is intended as a cross border action in the framework of a European Partnership programme to demonstrate the added value of the transnationally shared access to RIs for the transformation towards a sustainable blue economy. This action aims to fill gaps of the distribution of access to RIs by introducing an impact-oriented approach to research and innovation (R&I), support knowledge and data sharing and dissemination across Europe. The Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership will offer the access costs to use a RIs, but no other personal expenses to be reimbursed. Therefore, the organisation submitting an application will have to illustrate the feasibility of the projects by declaring availability of it's own resources.

This Call text, prepared under the relevant tasks of the Partnership and including input by the European Commission, has been validated by the RI providers and approved by the General Assembly of the Partnership.

The experience gained in the development of this TA Call will be useful to inform possible updates under each cut-off, duly adapting contents and procedures.

WHAT

The **European Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership (hereafter the Partnership) launches an open rolling call for** Transnational Access (TA) **to Research Infrastructures (RIs), and** invites private and public organisations to submit impact-oriented R&I project proposals for using the portfolio of RIs provided by beneficiaries of the Partnership, thus contributing to the objectives of the Partnership. The call is inspired by the TA schemes with the specific constraint that while the access to and use of the RIs is free of charge for the users, the implementation of the project shall be self-funded.

RIs providers, being partner of the Partnership, will make available a portfolio of RIs of the following typologies:

- *Research Vessels*
- *Fixed Platforms & Experimental Stations*
- *Mobile Platforms (AUVs, gliders, aircraft)*
- *Portable Equipment*
- *Analytical Laboratories & Test Benches*
- *High Performance Computing & Digital Facilities*
- *Virtual Labs / Virtual Access to data infrastructures*

The RIs of the portfolio are offered to public and private selected groups of ´users´of the blue economy pan-European community, i.e. researchers, engineers and technical staff of research organisations, private companies, non-profit organisations etc. submitting a successful proposal to the SBEP Rolling TA Call to RIs.

The Partnership's Research Infrastructure Catalogue provides detailed information on the infrastructures, services, and access modalities offered.

WHO

PROVIDER: An organisation offering access to its own RI in the TA Call. The Provider designates a keyperson for contacts referred to as 'RI provider contact point' (see Annex A).

USER: A user is an entity / group of subjects asking for access a RI. For this Call and the technical parts of the submission form, the term USER is intended as the Team members of the organisations requesting access to the RI, and whose proposal is selected for implementing the access.

APPLICANT: General term used for indicating either person or organisation presenting a proposal.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (PI): Leader of each organisation submitting a project proposal to the TA Call, either as Project Leader (i.e. Partner 1 of the Project) or as Project Partner.

TEAM MEMBER OR USER TEAM: Staff of the Project Leaders / Project Partners involved in the proposal.

PROJECT LEADER: Organisation coordinating the proposal. It must be from one Country of the Partnership.

PROJECT PARTNER: Organisation participating in but not leading the proposal, which may be established in any country worldwide.

SUSTAINABLE BLUE ECONOMY PARTNERSHIP (or PARTNERSHIP): Pan-European R&I initiative, joined by Member States, Associated and Third Countries together with the EU Commission to support the transition towards a sustainable blue economy by 2030, launching the Rolling TA Call to RIs.

TA MANAGEMENT WORKING GROUP (OF THE PARTNERSHIP): Technical secretariat in charge of: (i) collecting and dispatching the proposals to the evaluators; (ii) checking and adapting the work plans (feasibility and timeline) of the selected proposals together with the RIs' owners; (iii) organising and facilitating the meetings of the International Evaluation Panel (IEP); (iv) communicating to the applicants the result of the evaluation; (v) supporting the selected projects and the RI providers in resolving any possible dispute that may arise; and (vi) supporting the smooth implementation and follow-up of projects, at first by facilitating the signature of the user-provider agreement.

INTERNATIONAL EVALUATION PANEL OF THE TA CALL TO RIs (IEP): Group of independent international scientific and technical experts from the relevant research areas covered in this call, including experts in ethics and in RIs' management, in charge of the evaluation of the proposals.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PARTNERSHIP: Decision-making body of the Partnership. It is joined by all members of the Partnership. Only full beneficiaries have voting rights with a maximum of two voting members per country.

> EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PARTNERSHIP: Operational body for the execution of the Partnership composed of all Work Packages' leaders and co-leaders, assisting the Consortium for the implementation of the activities.

HOW

> Consult the catalogue (https://www.bluepartnership.eu/transnational-access-call-research-infrastructures) and contact the relevant RI provider to confirm that the access is feasible[1]

> Draft your proposal and submit it on the on-line platform (https://epss.proposals.ee/sustainable-blue/1)

> Receive the feedback from the evaluation

> If successful, sign the provider-user agreement

> Implement the project through access to the selected Research Infrastructures (RIs), in accordance with the access modality indicated in the proposal.

WHEN

> The Partnership's Transnational Access Call to Research Infrastructures (RIs) will remain continuously open for a period of 24 months, from February 2026 to February 2028.

> Proposals can be submitted at any time via the Electronic Proposal Submission System platform, and they will be evaluated at regular cut-off intervals every four months. Cut-off dates will be clearly published on the Partnership website. The next cut-off dates for this Call are: 22 February 2027, 11:00 CET; 21 June 2027, 11:00 CET; 20 October 2027, 11:00 CET; and 21 February 2028, 11:00 CET. Where a cut-off date falls on a weekend, the deadline moves to the following Monday.

> Applicants are encouraged to consult the website regularly to verify:

- *the next evaluation cut-off deadline;*
- *updates on RI availability;*
- *possible thematic focus updates for each cut-off.*

> Following each cut-off:

- *results of the evaluation will be communicated **four months after the cut-off**;*
- *projects will start **within six months from the evaluation results**, subject to confirmation by the RI provider.*

> All projects must be completed no later than October 2029, in line with the overall SBEP timeline.

[1] *Given the long-term nature of the Rolling Call, the list of Research Infrastructures (RIs) made available by the Partnership may be subject to updates and modifications over time. Applicants are therefore invited to always consult the most recent version of the RI Catalogue before preparing or submitting a proposal.*

1. CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVES

The Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership (SBEP, hereafter 'the Partnership') is a Research and Innovation (R&I) Partnership started in 2022 under the Horizon Europe Program, and is part of the Pilar II - Cluster 6 (Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment). It brings together 74 partner institutions from 32 countries and the European Commission to pool research and innovation investments and align national programmes at pan-European scale. The vision of the Partnership, defined in the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda1 encompasses:

- Designing, steer and support a just and inclusive transition to a regenerative, resilient, and sustainable blue economy.
- Boosting the transformation needed towards a climate-neutral, sustainable, productive, and competitive blue economy by 2030.
- Creating, enhance and sustain ocean health and the social, environmental and economic well-being of the people by 2050.

The Partnership enhances the science-policy interface in marine and maritime domains at both EU and international levels by aligning national, regional, and EU R&I priorities. It fosters deep collaboration between science, industry, policy, and civil society, building bridges across disciplines and sea basins.

Its strategic priorities are closely aligned with key EU and international frameworks, including:

- the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030[2];
- the Farm to Fork Strategy[3] and Zero Pollution Action Plan[4];
- the EU Mission "Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030"[5];
- the Circular Economy Action Plan[6];
- the communication on "Transforming the EU's Blue Economy for a Sustainable Future"[7];
- the newly launched EU Ocean Pact, fostering multi-actor commitment for a sustainable ocean[8] and related *OceanEye* initiative[9];

[2] Biodiversity strategy for 2030 - Environment - European Commission
[3] Farm to Fork Strategy - Food Safety - European Commission
[4] Zero Pollution Action Plan - Environment - European Commission
[5] Restore our Ocean and Waters - Research and innovation
[6] EUR-Lex - 52020DC0098 - EN - EUR-Lex
[7] COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS
[8] EUR-Lex - 52025DC0281 - EN - EUR-Lex, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=comnat:COM_2025_0281_FIN
[9] COM(2026) 268 final, OceanEye: An EU ocean observation initiative, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52026DC0268

- the *EU Industrial Maritime Strategy*[10] and the *EU Ports Strategy*[11];
- the *EU Strategy on resilient, prosperous and liveable coastal communities*[12];
- the *European Water Resilience Strategy*[13] and the forthcoming EU research and innovation strategy for ocean and water;
- the *EU Maritime Security Strategy*[14];
- the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the Water Framework Directive, the Habitats and Birds Directives (Natura 2000) and the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive[15];
- the Common Fisheries Policy and the Integrated Maritime Policy[16];
- the *European Strategy on Research and Technology Infrastructures*[17], which establishes a renewed framework for sustainable and digital research infrastructures, reinforcing transnational access.
- and global frameworks such as the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021–2030)[18] and the G7 - Future of the Seas and Ocean Initiative[19].

According to the official figures for 2022, the established sectors of the EU Blue Economy directly employed close to 4.82 million people, generated about EUR 890.6 billion in turnover and EUR 250.7 billion in gross value added (GVA). Furthermore, the estimates suggest that the EU Blue Economy sectors continued to grow in 2023, contributing EUR 263 billion to the EU GVA, and employing 4.88 million persons[20].

Recent analyses show that sustainable management and innovation in ocean sectors could significantly boost food security, biodiversity, job creation, and resilience to climate change. Leveraging the Digital Twin of the Ocean (DTO) will be pursued in alignment with the objectives of the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA 2024).

[10] COM(2026) 111 final, Communication on the EU Industrial Maritime Strategy, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52026DC0111

[11] COM(2026) 112 final, EU Ports Strategy, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52026DC0112

[12] COM(2026) 530 final, EU Strategy on resilient, prosperous and liveable coastal communities, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52026DC0530

[13] COM(2025) 280 final, European Water Resilience Strategy, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52025DC0280

[14] JOIN(2023) 8 final, Joint Communication on the update of the EU Maritime Security Strategy and its Action Plan, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52023JC0008

[15] Directive 2008/56/EC (Marine Strategy Framework Directive), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2008/56/oj; Directive 2000/60/EC (Water Framework Directive), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2000/60/oj; Council Directive 92/43/EEC (Habitats Directive), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/1992/43/oj; Directive 2009/147/EC (Birds Directive), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2009/147/oj; Directive 2014/89/EU (Maritime Spatial Planning Directive), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2014/89/oj

[16] Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2013/1380/oj; COM(2007) 575 final, An Integrated Maritime Policy for the European Union, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52007DC0575

[17] The European Strategy on Research and Technology Infrastructures - Research and innovation

[18] https://www.unesco.org/en/decades/ocean-decade

[19] https://www.g7fsoi.org/

[20] European Commission: Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Borriello, A., Calvo Santos, A., Feyen, L., Ghiani, M. et al., The EU blue economy report 2025, Publications Office of the European Union, 2025, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2771/2333701

These objectives are structured under three overarching Pillars:

Pillar 1 – A blue economy in harmony with nature

1. *Enhancing the scientific basis for the sustainable use of living and non-living marine resources.*
2. *Fostering collaboration with the private sector and industry to understand their capacity, needs, and trade-offs for increased pressures from use and multiuse of the ocean and seas in the face of a changing climate and associated extreme events, e.g. in relation to port developments, dredging, and maritime security.*
3. *Introducing innovative technological and circular developments, which follow the 'Rethink, Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Repair' principle (e.g. in R&I of materials).*
4. *Nature-based Solutions (NbS) for sustainable use and protection of marine ecosystems against eutrophication, harmful algal blooms (HAB), non-indigenous species, hazardous substances, litter, introduction of anthropogenic energy (underwater noise, light), overfishing, and physical damage to benthic and pelagic habitats, thereby restoring biodiversity.*
5. *Improving the monitoring of the health of our ocean and seas in concordance with the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD; Good Environmental Status criteria, GES) requirements of the assessment and predictable frameworks for the industry. Better understanding of (cumulative) impacts of (blue) economic activities from shallow areas to the deep sea in all European seas to improve effectiveness of measures.*
6. *Contributing to understanding and quantifying the ecosystem responses to climate change and direct and indirect anthropogenic pressures on the European sea basins at relevant spatial and temporal scales and in line with the specific requirements of the MSFD assessment framework, e.g. further development of existing and new indicators and related reference and threshold values forming baselines for activities at sea.*
7. *Delivering FAIR data (including socioeconomic and socioecological) and science-based recommendations for coherent ecosystem-based management, including Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) and multi-use of marine spaces.*
8. *Contributing to the development of tools to support maritime spatial planning (MSP), such as sensitivity mapping or modelling of cumulative impacts.*
9. *Promoting standardisation in innovation and procurement processes to scale up the application of new solutions at higher Technology Readiness Levels (TRL).*
10. *Enhancing and optimising the cost-benefit ratio of ocean and seas' modelling and observation capacities, including fostering the development of sensors, sensor networks and marine robotics, as well as by means of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning tools. This will include advancing digital twin technologies and supporting the European Digital Twin of the Ocean (EDITO) initiative.*
11. *Contributing concretely to alignment of national efforts to strengthen activities along the ocean observation value chain and data management and avoid duplication and fragmentation, including innovative governance concepts, e.g. demonstrating the value of ocean observation to society and removal of outdated regulations blocking transformation.*

Pillar 2 – Blue economy solutions towards climate neutrality

12. *Developing marine Nature-based Solutions (NbS) to improve resilience to natural disasters, increase natural capital, and restore ecosystems.*
13. *Fostering the carbon sequestration capacity and resilience of coastal and marine environments ('blue carbon'), including related management actions and preventing carbon seepage to the atmosphere caused by humans.*
14. *Supporting knowledge production and evidence-based recommendations for ocean and coastal resilience by quantifying at regional-scale and across basins the impacts of climate change and related stressors.*
15. *Supporting inventions for upscaling innovation in the renewable ocean energy sector (e.g. wind, wave and tidal energy) and focusing on solutions that reduce the use of energy, materials, and other resources and the impact on marine life.*
16. *Enabling novel materials and technologies for sustainable manufacturing and product lifecycle management.*
17. *Developing sustainable and cost-efficient solutions for construction, maintenance, reuse of multi-use offshore platforms.*
18. *Designing green and smart ports, blue marinas and transport.*
19. *Contributing to innovative and sustainable concepts for small- and medium-sized vessels and recreational boating.*

Pillar 3 – A thriving blue economy for the people

20. *Promote efficient and sustainable use of bioresources through biotechnology, AI, machine learning, digital twins and ICT. This includes value chain co-development and optimisation within the blue bioeconomy and biotechnology to reduce waste and ensure safe, healthy, affordable, and traceable products within a circular economy.*
21. *Enhance safety and efficiency in maritime operations by advancing autonomous technologies for offshore operations, including underwater deployment and maintenance while reducing risks for humans and the environment.*
22. *Encourage product and process innovation and exploration of low trophic level bioresources, innovate sustainable seafood production systems, including offshore, closed, low- and multi-trophic aquaculture, and low impact sustainable fisheries.*
23. *Strengthen resilience of coastal communities and sectors through preparedness for climatic, geological, and anthropogenic hazards, while analysing community needs, building diverse employment opportunities, and formulating sustainable tourism models valuing coastal and maritime heritage.*
24. *Promote human health and safety by generating knowledge that helps mitigate risks from marine-borne pathogens, toxins, harmful algae, toxicants, and pollutants.*
25. *Ensure equitable benefit-sharing in marine activities, including biodiscovery.*

26. *Explore and harness the potential of blue spaces and economies to improve the health and well-being of diverse communities, ensuring equitable access and benefits.*
27. *Foster equity from innovation, circularity, and job creation in coastal communities.*
28. *Foster a community of practice (CoPr) for knowledge sharing and co-creation of skills on advancing the sustainable blue economy.*
29. *Promote financial instruments for inclusion (especially for disadvantaged/marginalised groups) and transparency, while ensuring accountability of key actors.*

TA aApplicants are expected to clearly demonstrate how their proposals contribute to one or more of the SRIA Pillars and objectives listed above, ensuring alignment with the Partnership's overall goals towards a sustainable, climate-neutral and resilient blue economy. Proposals should explicitly indicate the relevant Pillar(s) and, when applicable , the specific objective(s) addressed and describe how the planned activities will generate measurable impact in line with the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA 2024).

In addition to yearly Joint Calls for R&I proposals[21], the Partnership implements a set of structuring actions, such as piloting access to marine and maritime Research Infrastructures (RIs).

The infrastructures accessible by the rolling call include, among the others, research vessels, fixed and mobile platforms, high-performance computing, analytical labs, virtual labs and calibration facilities. Many of these facilities belongs to national RIs and/or the EU Strategy Forum for Research Infrastructures (ESFRI) RIs and have been made available for access through an open expression of interest from SBEP organisations of participating Countries . The research infrastructures are the result of decades of European and national investment and of collaborative projects. In particular collaborative projects set the framework of the Transnational Access mechanism which piloted the development of the Access Services implemented later by pan-European research infrastructures such as EMSO, Euro-Argo, EMBRC, LifeWatch, DANUBIUS-RI to mention few.

In June 2026, the European Commission adopted OceanEye, an initiative to strengthen ocean observation that aims to position the EU as the leading global provider of ocean intelligence by 2035. OceanEye includes an International Alliance, co-led by the EU and Canada in partnership with the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO (IOC-UNESCO), to support the Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS).[22]

[21] To date, the Partnership has launched four Joint Calls for R&I projects, co-funding a total of 43 transnational projects (19 from the first call and 24 from the second), while the evaluation of proposals submitted under the third Joint Call is currently ongoing. Further information on the funded projects is available in the Partnership's brochures, accessible at: https://bluepartnership.eu/projects.

[22] European Commission, Reinforcing global ocean observation, https://commission.europa.eu/topics/fisheries-and-ocean/reinforcing-global-ocean-observation_en; IOC-UNESCO, EU and IOC of UNESCO join forces in International Alliance to strengthen global ocean observations, 15 June 2026, https://www.ioc.unesco.org/en/articles/eu-and-ioc-unesco-join-forces-international-alliance-strengthen-global-ocean-observations

In this framework, Research Infrastructures are strategic assets since they are acknowledged as enabler of integration of the EU Research Area and innovation environments since they:

- strengthen the innovation capacity of Research Performing Organisations (RPOs), start-ups, SMEs, and local industry;
- overcome regional fragmentation and enhance cooperation between countries with diverse capacities thus favouring internationalization;
- support open science, ocean literacy, and uptake of ocean data by decision-makers;
- promote transnational collaboration, technology transfer, and cross-sector innovation;
- align with initiatives such as the Blue Skills Compact, Pact for Skills, and the EU Knowledge System for the Ocean.

The creation of dynamic user communities, networks, and ecosystems around marine RIs enhances operational efficiency, fosters excellence, and widens participation. As part of its widening and internationalisation strategy, the Partnership also encourages access from countries with less-developed RI systems or those affected by barriers to marine operations (e.g. geopolitical instability or limited infrastructure, as observed in parts of the Black Sea).

The Rolling aTA Call to RIs builds on the outcomes of the first TA Call, integrating lessons learned and feedback from the pilot phase to further streamline procedures and strengthen feasibility checks with RI providers. It allows applicants from across the European and international blue economy community — including research institutions, private companies, public authorities, NGOs and more — to submit proposals asking for access to one or more RIs and facilities made available within the Partnership.

In line with the Partnership's operational priorities, the call aims to:

- Contribute to the implementation of the SRIA through strategic, impact-oriented access projects;
- Support the Partnership's widening and internationalisation strategy, including sea-basin and regional coverage;
- Foster synergies with other EU initiatives, notably the EU Mission "Restore our Ocean and Waters", the EU DTO, and the Horizon Europe Work Programme for RIs;
- Promote open data, open science and FAIR data principles;
- Facilitate technology testing, innovative service development, and SME-driven solutions;
- Improve skills, capacity building, and human capital development;
- Leverage national RI investment plans and align with the ESFRI roadmap;
- Reinforce the strategic-operational interface between the Partnership and marine RIs;

- Ensure efficient use and sharing of RIs, enhancing value for public investment.

Ultimately, the outcomes of this action, which is novel for an EU Partnership project, will help inform the design of future calls, joint programming activities, and broader RI integration within the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership framework.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE CALL FOR ACCESS TO RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURES

2.1 General requirements

Applications in this call must be impact-driven contributions to the transformation into a blue economy for a more resilient future and towards carbon neutrality targets, following an impact pathway approach. Each project should therefore describe its impacts accordingly. It is recommended that the potential beneficiaries of the outcomes of the projects are identified in the project proposal.

Project proposals may briefly describe how they relate to the relevant strategies and initiatives described in the context and objectives of the Call (Section 1).

Proposals will be evaluated in terms of scientific excellence, impact and implementation (see Annex B), and considered eligible if contributing to at least one SRIA Pillar (see Section 2.2). At the same time, reflections on contributions to relevant initiatives will be appreciated as well as on stakeholders' engagement, including a broad range of actors, i.e. industry partners, citizens, and policy makers. These are indeed considered as means to enhance innovation and societal relevance and, ultimately, to promote a change and increase the impact of the projects. In the framework of dissemination, communication and outreach activities, capacity building actions, such as education and training, will also be positively considered.

The proposals must address European Sea basins: the Mediterranean Sea, the Black Sea, the Baltic Sea, the North Sea, the Atlantic Ocean, and other regional European areas such as Arctic Ocean, Barents Sea, Celtic Sea, Adriatic Sea, Aegean Seas, etc.

Applicants are expected to assess the projects' impact on the sea-basin(s) targeted in their proposal and address possible scalability in other basins. At the regional level, complementarities and synergies with the lighthouses of the EU Mission 'Restore our Oceans and Waters' will be requested especially for the potential joint valorisation of the outcomes of the projects. Furthermore, the SBEP TA scheme complements the operational ESRI RIs access services and existing Horizon Europe TA calls To ensure clarity for applicants and maximise European added value, proponents are asked to indicate in Part A of the application form whether they have previously benefited from access under these initiatives and, if so, to explain briefly how the access requested under SBEP is complementary (e.g. a subsequent research phase, additional analyses or broader geographic coverage).

Coordinators and partners of projects co-funded under the Partnership's Joint Calls are welcome to apply for access needs arising from their projects. Their proposals follow the same eligibility and evaluation rules as all other proposals.

2.2 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES OF THE SRIA

The Strategic Objectives of the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership (SBEP) translate the high-level ambitions of the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA) into actionable priorities for access projects under this TA Call. Unlike the former *Intervention Areas*, which framed Partnership activities in 2024, the Strategic Objectives provide a cross-cutting, enabling perspective that addresses the technological, societal, and systemic needs required for the transition to a sustainable blue economy.

Applicants must clearly indicate in their proposals which SRIA Pillar(s) and, where useful, which specific Strategic Objective(s) their project will address, and describe how the requested Research Infrastructure (RI) access will contribute to achieving these goals. Proposals may target more than one objective, provided the contribution is substantial and well justified.

The Pillar(s) and any specific objective(s) are indicated in Part A of the application form. Proposals that demonstrate clear and measurable contributions to more than one Strategic Objective will be considered particularly valuable, provided that the requested RI access remains coherent with the overall scope of the call. In addition, the evaluation of proposals (see Annex B) will explicitly include an assessment of their alignment with the SRIA, thereby replacing the previous criterion of "fit to Intervention Areas."

2.3 Impact of the proposals

Under Horizon Europe, the EU Members-States and Associated Countries aim to create significant societal and environmental impacts. In this context, applicants need to describe the expected impact of their R&I project that applies for RI access and how it contributes to the overall impacts defined under this call:

- *The potential for impact beyond the academic world, such as in societal, technical, environmental, economic, policy-making, or behavioural realms;*
- *How relevant stakeholders, including industry, and blue economy communities can be involved in, and/or benefit from, the design and achievement of the R&I project;*
- *To what extent the project contributes to address the enhancement of human capacity building development;*
- *How approaches for achieving impact are integrated into the project design and conducted by the team;*
- *The potential for a long-term collaboration at international level.*

The Theory of Change (ToC) offers a methodology with a related Impact Pathway (IP) to describe the research process, mentioning well-specified outputs and outcomes. The use of a ToC is encouraged but not mandatory. This methodology helps applicants describe how and why the proposed activities are expected to lead to desired changes, by identifying the logical

sequence between inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts. A well-defined ToC makes explicit the underlying assumptions and external factors influencing the expected results, providing a clear and transparent framework to monitor progress and measure impact throughout the project lifecycle[23].

The credibility of the pathways to achieve the expected outcomes and impacts specified in the call text will be considered in the evaluation of the proposals.

[23] For further guidance, applicants may consult the workshop provided by the Dutch Research Council (NWO): https://impact.nwo.nl/en/working-with-an-impact-plan

3. TECHNICAL INFORMATION ON RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURES AVAILABLE FOR THE CALL

In the SBEP framework, Transnational Access (TA) implies the free-ofcharge use of research infrastructures or installations for users selected on competitive basis. Similarely to the ordinary TA scheme implemented in HE projects, the majority of the team members (> 50%) must be employed in a Country other than the Country to which the infrastructure belongs.

The Partnership offers a portfolio of 66 Research Infrastructures (62 available for the third cut-off, see Annex A) through the availability of the following typology of RIs:

- *Research Vessels*
- *Fixed Platforms & Experimental Stations*
- *Mobile Platforms (AUVs, gliders, aircraft)*
- *Portable Equipment*
- *Analytical Laboratories & Test Benches*
- *High Performance Computing & Digital Facilities*
- *Virtual Labs / Virtual Access to data infrastructures*

The RIs access can be implemented according to different access typology: ***Physical*** *(in person/hands-on): the presence of the user team is required/recommended during the whole operation period*

- ***Remote****: the requested facility is operated by the owner's staff and the presence of the user team is not required.*
- ***Virtual:*** *access is provided through digital platforms, computational infrastructures, databases, or simulation environments, where no physical presence is needed. This includes the use of high-performance computing facilities, cloud-based services, data repositories, or virtual laboratories, enabling advanced modelling, digital testing, or analysis of datasets.*

A detailed catalogue is available at this link: https://www.bluepartnership.eu/transnational-access-call-research-infrastructures.

Please note that some providers may also enable partially remote access: the presence of the user team is required at some stage (e.g. installing and un-installing, sample collection and storage). Please contact the provider to further explore.

4. PROCEDURES, ELIGIBILITY, AND SELECTION CRITERIA

4.1 Call process

The TA Call to RIs will be advertised online from the following web pages:

- *Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership website and social media:*
  - *Website: https://www.bluepartnership.eu/transnational-access-call-research-infrastructures,*
  - *Linkedin: https://www.linkedin.com/company/blue-economy-eu/*
  - *X: @BlueEconomyEU*
- *Online Submission Tool: https://epss.proposals.ee/sustainable-blue/1*
- *Relevant webpages of Partnership's partners and the European Commission as well as of other relevant EU projects/infrastructure Consortia.*

The TA Call to RIs under SBEP is implemented through a rolling call format, designed to ensure maximum flexibility for applicants and providers while guaranteeing transparency, fairness, and scientific excellence in the selection process.

The call will remain open continuously for a minimum period of 24 months, during which applicants may submit proposals at any time through the Electronic Proposal Submission System (EPSS). Proposals submitted will not be evaluated on an ongoing basis but will instead be collected and assessed at regular cut-off dates scheduled every four months (see Section 4.2). The indicative timetable for these cut-offs, together with any updates, will be made publicly available on the Partnership website and communicated through the official channels of the Partnership Secretariat.

At each cut-off date, the following sequence of steps will be applied:

1. Submission of proposals
   - Proposals submitted before the cut-off deadline are automatically time-stamped and registered by the EPSS.
   - Each proposal receives a unique Proposal Identification Code (PIC).
   - Only the most recent version submitted by the Project Leader before the cut-off will be considered; earlier drafts will be disregarded.
2. Eligibility check

- Immediately following the cut-off, the TA Management Working Group (TA MWG) verifies that proposals comply with the eligibility criteria defined in Section 4.6 of this document.
- This check ensures that proposals are complete, submitted on time, written in English, identify at least one RI provider, and address data management in the project description.
- Proposals not meeting the eligibility requirements are declared ineligible and will not proceed to evaluation. Applicants will be notified of the reasons for ineligibility.

3. Independent scientific and technical evaluation
   - Eligible proposals will be evaluated in a single step and assigned to the International Evaluation Panel (IEP).
   - Each proposal is reviewed by at least three independent experts, selected according to their expertise in the relevant scientific field, technology domain, RI management, and ethics.
   - Evaluators assess proposals against the criteria of Excellence, Impact, and Implementation, as described in Annex B, with explicit consideration of alignment with the SRIA (see Section 2.2).
   - Evaluators complete individual assessments, followed by a consensus meeting moderated by the IEP Chair and Vice-Chair, where the rapporteurs present each proposal, to agree on consolidated scores and comments.
4. Consensus ranking and prioritisation
   - The IEP establishes a consensus ranking of all evaluated proposals, taking into account the minimum thresholds (3/5 per criterion, 10/15 overall).
   - In case of high number of application received, projects above threshold are categorised as “High Priority” or “Low Priority” according to their overall score and strategic relevance.
   - In cases of tied scores, the IEP applies additional prioritisation principles, such as maximising geographical coverage, supporting new users, balancing sea basins, and ensuring diversity across SRIA Pillars and objectives.
5. Logistic validation with RI providers
   - Successful proposals undergo a feasibility and scheduling validation by the RI provider(s) concerned (see Annex A for provider contact points).
   - This step ensures that the requested RI access is technically possible, safe, and compatible with availability (time slots, location, equipment).

- Where necessary, RI providers may propose adjustments to scheduling, suggest alternative or complementary infrastructures, or recommend integration with other projects to optimise resources.

6. Final decision and communication of results
    - Following logistical validation, the IEP Chair and Vice-Chair, together with the TA MWG and the Executive Committee of the Partnership, confirm the final list of selected proposals.
    - Applicants are formally notified of the outcome by official communication.
    - Unsuccessful applicants will receive a summary of the evaluation report, including strengths and weaknesses of the proposal, to support possible resubmission at a later cut-off.
7. Agreement and project start
    - Successful applicants are invited to enter into a User-Provider Agreement with the relevant RI provider(s) (see Annex D).
    - The TA Mgmt WG facilitates this process and ensures that agreements are signed within the indicative timeframe.
    - Projects are expected to start implementation within six months of the evaluation results being communicated, unless otherwise agreed due to logistical constraints.

This structured process ensures that the TA Call is fair, competitive, transparent, and impact-oriented, while also allowing flexibility for applicants through the rolling format. It also reflects the Partnership's commitment to balancing scientific excellence with feasibility, inclusiveness, and strategic impact across European and international blue economy communities.

4.2 Call timetable

The Transnational Access (TA) Call to Research Infrastructures (RIs) operates as a Rolling Call, allowing applicants to submit proposals on a continuous basis within a structured framework of defined cut-off dates. This model ensures flexibility for applicants while maintaining transparency, predictability, and coordination with the Partnership's overall implementation cycle.

Each phase of the Rolling Call follows a sequence of activities that includes:

- *Pre-announcement and official launch of the call and information webinar;*
- *A **cut-off date** for proposal submission (four months after launch);*
- *Eligibility checks, evaluation by the International Evaluation Panel (IEP), and communication of results (within four months after the cut-off);*

- *Fine-tuning and agreement phase between selected applicants and RI providers;*
- *A project execution and reporting period lasting up to 18 months from the start date of access.*

The indicative schedule for the upcoming Rolling Call phases is presented below:

Launch	Cut-off	Evaluation & Communication of results	Project duration and reporting
11 February 2026 – Pre-announcement 20 February 2026 – Official Launch	**20 June 2026**	October 2026 – Evaluation results communicated to applicants	Access and project execution from December 2026 to June 2028
June 2026 – Second Launch Window	**20 October 2026, 11:00 CET**	February 2027 – Evaluation results communicated to applicants	Access and project execution from April 2027 to October 2028
October 2026 – Launch Window	**22 February 2027, 11:00 CET**	June 2027 – Evaluation results communicated to applicants	Access and project execution from August 2027 to February 2029
February 2027 – Launch Window	**21 June 2027, 11:00 CET**	October 2027 – Evaluation results communicated to applicants	Access and project execution from December 2027 to June 2029
June 2027 – Launch Window	**20 October 2027, 11:00 CET**	February 2028 – Evaluation results communicated to applicants	Access and project execution from April 2028 to October 2029
October 2027 – Final Launch Window	**21 February 2028, 11:00 CET**	June 2028 – Evaluation results communicated to applicants	Access and project execution from August 2028 to October 2029

Table 1 – SBEP Rolling TA Call to RIs timetable

Each cut-off will be followed by an evaluation cycle coordinated by the TA Management Working Group and the International Evaluation Panel (IEP). Results will be validated by the RI Providers and communicated to applicants shortly after the IEP meeting.

Any changes to this timetable will be communicated through the official channels of the Partnership and published on the website: https://bluepartnership.eu.

4.3 Confidentiality and conflict of interests

The Partnership is committed to avoiding any Conflict of Interest and safeguarding good scientific practice.

A Code of Conduct related to Conflict of Interests, confidentiality and non-disclosure is defined and applies to the representatives of the General Assembly of the Partnership, the TA Management Working Group, the contact persons of the RI providers and the International Evaluation Panel (IEP, see Section 4.8.1). An important aspect of this code is the avoidance of any conflicts between personal and applicants interests.

Representatives of the Partnership's General Assembly and relevant support bodies (TA Management Working Group and International Evaluation Panel)

The representatives of the General Assembly of the Partnership, the TA Management Working Group and the IEP 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:

1. Involvement in the application process

– *Being involved in any proposal and in the preparation of any proposal, either as PI and team member or being involved in the publication or exploitation of the results;*

– *Having submitted a proposal as a PI or a team member, under the call;*

2. Relationship towards the applicant

– *Being a 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 IEP 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 (PIs and team members) or being involved in the publication or exploitation of the results of the proposal;*

– *Having implemented with an applicant (PIs and team members) joint projects or joint publications within the past three years (e.g., have co-authored and published an article with an applicant during the last three years);*

– *Having (or having had during the last three years) a close scientific collaboration with an applicant (PIs and team members) of the proposal;*

– *Having (or having had) a relationship of scientific rivalry or professional hostility with an applicant (PIs and team members) of the proposal;*

- *Having (or having had), a mentor/mentee relationship specifically with a Principal Investigator of the proposal;*
- *Having a current or prior (in the last three years) activity in advisory bodies of the applicant's institution, e.g., scientific advisory boards;*

3. Personal interest

- *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 IEP members from participating in the evaluation impartially could be considered a conflict of interest and should be reported as such by the IEP members.

Applicants of a proposal submitted under this SBEP Rolling TA Call to RIs (including the PIs and team members) may not serve as IEP members.

Beneficiaries/affiliated entities of the Partnership being RI providers and participating in this TA Call to RIs

Research teams of some beneficiaries/affiliated entities of the Partnership, or specific research teams of a partner where applicable, that are providers of RIs may participate in this SBEP Rolling TA Call to RIs. For those partners, firewall measures have been foreseen to mitigate the risk of, perception of, or de facto conflict of interest or unequal treatment of applicants, including clear segregation of duties.

To ensure complete transparency and inform the recipients of calls, the organisations that are RIs providers and partners of the Partnership's Consortium who may apply to the SBEP Rolling TA Call to RIs are explicitly listed in Annex A 'CONTACT POINTS', emphasising their compliance with the firewall measures. Their involvement in the preparation, selection and follow-up/monitoring of the calls is regulated as follows:

- Preparation of the TA Call: *The RI Providers support the identification of the relevant framework rules embedded in this Call and the drafting of the standard template of the agreement regulating the relationship between the providers and the users. In this regard, they also validate the final text of the TA Call to RIs*
- Selection of projects: *Following the finalisation of the evaluation procedure by the IEP, the contact points of the RI provider organisations for which the RI has been requested, listed in Annex A, will oversee the validation of the ranking list with specific regard to the technical feasibility of the proposal and are thus impeded to apply to this Rolling SBEP TA Call to RIs. They can also be consulted in case a dispute is put forward e.g. by an applicant on the outcome of the evaluation.*
- Follow-up of Projects*: Providing the subscription of or compliance with the user-provider agreement, RI Providers can request specific information to the users. Also the TA Management Working Group can make inquiries about the state of play.*

Furthermore, the following firewall measures apply: (i) an organisation from a given country is not allowed to request access as Project Leader to a RI run by an organisation of the same country, under this TA to RIs Call; (ii) the majority (> 50%) of the team members must be employed in a country other than the country that owns and operates the infrastructure.

Concrete measures to avoid potential Conflicts of Interest or unequal treatment of applicants are ensured.

4.4 Publishable information

A list of successful projects (access secured)will be published at the end of the call process (once the projects have been selected) on the Partnership website. Therefore, applicants should be aware that the following information from the proposals may be published by the Partnership and RI Providers for promotional purposes: (1) Project Title and Project Acronym, (2) Publishable short abstract, (3) Main Research Infrastructure requested for access, (4) Duration of the project, (5) Total costs of the project, (6) Organisation name and country of each Partner, (7) Name of the PI.

The Partnership, through the dedicated TA Management Working Group, will subsequently handle projects approved for access. Those will be governed by the confidentiality rules according to the provision of the user-provider agreement.

4.5 Privacy policy

By applying, the PIs and team members agree to the use, share (for specific purposes: *e.g.*, evaluation, for the future nomination of experts, Partnership-specific communication) and the storage of projects-related information according to the Privacy Policy and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The Online Submission Tool presents further information on the Privacy Policy at this link https://epss.proposals.ee/sustainable-blue/1.

4.6 Eligibility criteria

Applicants to the Rolling SBEP TA Call to RIs can be employed by an organisation in any country of the world. It must be noted that access for team members of a proposal selected for access with a majority of Partners not working in an EU Member State or Horizon Europe Associated country is limited to 20% of the total amount of units of access provided.

The organisations can be any legal entity including public organisations, private companies, non-profit organisations, etc. Participation of legal entities from third countries (not Member States nor associated to Horizon Europe) shall be demonstrated as essential for the implementation of the action.

Proposals must comply with the following 13 strict general eligibility criteria:

Scope	1. *Proposals must address at least one **Pillar of the SRIA***

	2. ***Proposals must formulate a clear request of access to at least one and up to two RIs.*** 3. ***Proposals must address at least one geographical area among: Mediterranean Sea, Black Sea, Baltic Sea, North Sea, Atlantic Ocean. If applicable, proposals must indicate regional areas (e.g. Arctic Ocean, Barents Sea, Celtic Sea, Adriatic Sea, Aegean Seas, etc.) or their scope must be proved to be relevant for one or more above mentioned geographical areas.***
Feasibility	4. *The PI of the Project Leader must declare, on behalf of the Project Leader and all Partners, that own resources are available for the self-funded component (declaration in Part C of the application form), and must **confirm the consensus by the RI provider** on the feasibility of the proposal.*
Team composition	5. ***International cooperation** - Proposals must involve **at least two Partners from two different countries** and requesting access to a beneficiary making RIs available as provider. **Not all team members shall necessarily access the infrastructure** and can be involved in other activities in support to the project, also considering the availability of RI provider.* 6. ***Firewall measure** - The **Project Leader PI and the majority (> 50%) of the team members must be employed in a country other than the country that owns and operates the infrastructure**. They cannot apply for access to a research infrastructure from their own country.* *Example 1: A PI based in Germany is entitled to apply for access to all of the listed RIs, except the RIs run in Germany, and/or any piece of equipment provided in Germany.* *Example 2: If an application is requesting access to an infrastructure based in Germany 1 to be located on/used together with another infrastructure based in Spain 2, the PIs and the majority (> 50%) of team members must be employed in a country other than both Germany and Spain(1 and 2).* 7. ***Firewall measure** - **An organisation being RI provider cannot be Leader/Partner in a proposal requesting access to the same RI it owns/runs.** Users-providers' synergies are anyway encouraged and can be outlined as part of the user-provider agreement.*
Principal Investigator (PI) of the Project Leader	8. *In each proposal, **one entity must act as the Project Leader**.* 9. *The PI of a given entity submitting a proposal can act as **PI of the Project Leader (coordinator) only in one proposal**. He/she can apply as PI/team member of a Project Partner in other proposals.*
Duration of the requested access	10. *The access must be **initiated within 6 months** from the reception of the outcomes of the evaluation and **terminated within 18 months** from the starting date.*
Proposals submission	A single-step process will apply, with a mandatory submission of proposals. Proposals must be: 11. *Written in English.* 12. *Submitted electronically with the Electronic Proposal Submission System (EPSS) before the set deadlines at https://epss.proposals.ee/sustainable-blue/1 (instructions for electronic*

	submission will be available on the Partnership website at https://www.bluepartnership.eu/transnational-access-call-research-infrastructures) in February 2026. 13. *Complete, respectful of the page limits and the number/type of attachments allowed, including CV template (to be filled in online) that are in line with sound principles for research assessment according to the proposal form (**Annex C**) and information provided in the EPSS.*

Table 2 – SBEP Rolling TA Call to RIs general eligibility criteria

A proposal that does not fulfil all the general eligibility criteria reported above will be considered ineligible and rejected.

Any change in the Partners' composition must conform to the general eligibility criteria defined in this section and be validated by the TA Management Working Group.

Proposals that fulfil all requirements i.e., general eligibility criteria, will enter the evaluation process described in Annex B. The TA Management Working Group will communicate the results of the eligibility check and the decisions taken to the PI of the Project Leader after the completion of the evaluation procedure.

4.6.1 Recommendations for the applicants

Collaborative applications from teams and institutions based in Countries where equivalent RI do not exist are strongly encouraged, as well as applications from female, young and early career scientists. International and/or industrial partners are welcome.

All project partners and user team members should take into consideration the following recommendations for setting up their project proposals:

Scope:

- *Proposals should go beyond the state of the art by providing high-quality R&I and, when appropriate, make use of innovative technologies, approaches, and concepts to do so;*
- *Proposals should be scientifically excellent and relevant to policies framed under the Blue Economy and consider ongoing research activities funded by other EU HE Framework Programme, Missions, INFRA projects, European RI Consortia, other instruments, programmes, or projects. Cooperation with these activities is of high importance to avoid redundancy, favour complementarity and increase synergies;*
- *Proposals should highlight the added value of the requested RIs to address the challenges outlined in the Pillar(s) and, where relevant, the strategic objectives of the SRIA and are encouraged to address more than one Pillar or objective to value opportunities for cross-fertilisation;*
- *Proposals should contribute to cross-cutting themes such as the open data policy, development of capacity-building activities and ocean literacy activities, promote the*

inclusion of young people in the activities and knowledge transfer, follow partnership communication guidelines using a common visual identity, to promote equal opportunities for participation of women and men in the research consortia and comply with EC ethics self-assessment principles;

- *Where applicable, proposals are strongly encouraged to envisage fertilisation measures across sea-basins, including by covering a broad geographic scale (i.e., more than one sub-sea basin) and/or considering the impact of the projects on other EU sea basins.*

Team composition:

- *All proposals are encouraged to consider the geographical balance of the applicants and the implementation in appropriate geographic settings and according to the objectives of the proposal, including in low- and middle-income countries/regions, and less-performing countries; a particular consideration for PIs/team members working in countries/regions where no equivalent infrastructures exist or are presently unavailable for use is also encouraged.*
- *It is encouraged to involve stakeholders from the blue economy community (i.e., SMEs), industries, authorities, public administrations, associations, as well as civil society organisations) at the appropriate scale. Stakeholder engagement in the research projects will enhance innovation, policy, and societal relevance and ultimately the impact of the projects;*
- *All proposals should integrate the gender dimension*[24] *of R&I activities;*

Budget:

- *Successful applicants will be granted free access to the selected RIs. The cost for using the RIs are co-funded by the Partnership, the European Commission and the RI provider.*
- *No other costs of the project nor personnel effort/travel/shipping of equipment or any other support will be provided to the members of the team. Therefore, the feasibility of the project through own resources shall be proved.*

Data management:

Applicants are expected to clearly address data management aspects within their proposal (in the Impact section of the project description), ensuring that research data are handled according to Open Access and FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable) principles. A sound data management approach should describe how data will be collected, stored, shared, and preserved, while considering ethical, legal, and security requirements.

[24] https://erc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document/file/GEPs_in_HE_guidelines.pdf

For further guidance, applicants may consult the European Commission's resources on Open Access and FAIR data: https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/open-science/open-access_en.

Please note: *A formal Data Management Plan (DMP) will be requested at a later stage, following project selection or during the early implementation phase, to ensure compliance with the Partnership's open data and FAIR principles. The DMP must be submitted within 3 months from the signature of the User–Provider Agreement. An updated version of the DMP may also be requested during project implementation, in order to ensure compliance with FAIR principles and alignment with evolving data workflows.*

4.6.2 Ethical issues

The TA Management Working Group will include the evaluation of compliance with relevant ethical criteria. Applicants must complete the ethics self-assessment in Part D of the application form and explain how any issue flagged will be addressed. If a research permit or a statement by an ethics committee is required for the implementation of the project, applicants should provide information on the permits or permit proposals.

Applicants are required to adhere to the principles of good scientific practice and to follow the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity by ALLEA[25] (All European Academies) and the Global Code of Conduct for Research in Resource-Poor Settings[26]. Projects must comply with the 'Do no significant harm principle'[27], as declared in Part D of the application form. Furthermore, in case of physical access to a RI, any investigation will be observed and carried out in accordance with the general principles of the 'Code of Conduct for Responsible Marine Research in the Deep Seas and High Seas of the OSPAR Maritime Area'[28], regardless of the area of operation.

Any proposal which seems to contravene fundamental ethical principles will not be selected and may be excluded from the selection procedure by the IEP. Judgment of the significance of ethical issues will be made by using the criteria published by the European Commission in its guidelines on How to Complete your Ethics Self-Assessment[29].

4.7 Submission procedure

A single step procedure will apply to this Access Call; the submission of proposals is mandatory.

Proposals must be submitted electronically using the EPSS: https://epss.proposals.ee/sustainable-blue/1.

[25] https://allea.org/code-of-conduct/
[26] https://www.globalcodeofconduct.org/
[27] https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/support/faq/15485
[28] https://www.ospar.org/site/assets/files/1357/mou_isa.pdf
[29] https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/guidance/how-to-complete-your-ethics-self-assessment_en.pdf

Instructions for electronic submission will be available on the Partnership website at https://www.bluepartnership.eu/transnational-access-call-research-infrastructures, in February 2026.

For any technical questions regarding the submission procedure using the EPSS, please contact the SBEP EPSS technical helpdesk: epss.sbep@proposals.ee.

Please note that:

- *The online system may experience high traffic volumes in the last hours before the submission deadline and it is therefore highly recommended to submit the final version of the proposal well in advance of the deadline to avoid any last-minute technical problems;*
- *The submission system will close at 11:00 CET on each cut-off date. Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit their proposal well in advance of the cut-off.*
- *Please note that both the TA Management Working Group and the EPSS Technical Help Desk can provide support only during standard working hours (09:00–17:00 CET) on working days. No support can be guaranteed after 11:00 CET on the cut-off date. Proposals submitted after 11:00 CET will automatically fall into the next evaluation cycle. Requests for extensions of the deadline due to last-minute technical problems will not be considered. Any proposals not correctly submitted at this moment will be declared ineligible;*
- *All complete proposals will be submitted automatically at each cut-off, to avoid a situation where an applicant does not have time to click on the submit button. In this situation, the proposal will be evaluated as it stands;*
- *Applicants may submit their proposal early and continue refining or replacing it until the cut-off date. Only the latest submitted version will be considered. Early submission is highly recommended to avoid last-minute congestion and technical limitations.*

4.7.1 Submission of a Proposal (mandatory stage)

Applicants must submit proposals within the established deadline and according to the procedure illustrated below. It is not possible to enter the procedure at a later stage.

A proposal eligibility check will be carried out by the TA Management Working Group, based on the general eligibility rules. The eligible proposals will be sent to the scientific evaluation at the international level.

Submission on the EPSS:

- *The Principal Investigator (PI) of the Project Leader creates an account on the EPSS (https://epss.proposals.ee/sustainable-blue/1);*
- *The Project Leader can enter, edit and save the electronic forms, add team members, indicate the required infrastructure(s) (up to max 2), upload the project description (8*

pages maximum) and submit the proposal. Partners can enter and edit their own data only.

- *All PIs of the Project Partners shall create an account and log into the EPSS to provide the information required for the participation;*
- *All information must be written in English. The proposal is a self-contained document. Links and hyperlinks are not allowed;*
- *Information entered or uploaded on the platform can be updated until the submission deadline.*

4.8 Evaluation of proposals

Access to any infrastructures offered by the Partnership will be regulated according to the Excellence-driven access mode. This mode of access is dependent on the scientific excellence, originality, quality and technical and ethical feasibility of an application evaluated through peer review conducted by IEP. Only scientifically top-ranked proposals will be considered for the logistical fine-tune, ensuring that only excellent proposals are considered for access.

Evaluation Criteria are detailed in Annex B.

The TA Management Working Group in supporting the IEP will apply the principles of transparency, fairness and impartiality. The TA Management Working Group accompanies the proposals throughout the different steps of the evaluation process and – if the proposal is successful – even afterwards for the access and reporting.

A single-step procedure will apply for the proposals' evaluation.

4.8.1 The International Evaluation Panel

4.8.1.1 Selection of reviewers

The TA Management Working Group will establish an International Evaluation Panel (IEP) for access to RI upon input of the RI providers, the General Assembly of the Partnership as well as making profit of the portfolio of evaluators of the Partnership's transnational Joint Calls and/or the portfolio of evaluators from other relevant RI TA projects/networks (e.g. Science Europe[30], the European Marine Board[31], EurOcean[32], etc.).

The composition of evaluation panels will consider the gender and geographical balance.

The IEP will comprise international scientific and technical experts from the relevant research areas covered in this call, including experts in ethics. The IEP composition should allow

[30] https://scienceeurope.org/
[31] https://www.marineboard.eu/
[32] https://eurocean.org/

covering, as far as possible, the range of SRIA Pillars addressed by the present call as well as consider RIs' management competences.

The experts examine the proposal(s) assigned to them, score and comment each proposal following strictly the Evaluation Criteria (see Annex B) using an individual Proposal Assessment Form.

IEP members will have to sign a confidentiality, non-disclosure and conflict of interest policy and will have to declare all their potential conflicts of interest with submitted proposals (Declaration of Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest Form). The TA Management Working Group will also check that no conflict of interest exists concerning the proposals evaluated.

IEP members cannot be applicants in this TA Call and cannot evaluate proposals with which they declared a conflict of interest, to ensure a fair evaluation process and equal treatment of applicants. The IEP will be headed by a Chair and a Vice-Chair. The Chair and the Vice-Chair will be regular members of the IEP with the added duties of moderating the IEP meeting and conveying the results of the discussions through the TA Management WG to the RI providers for validation and to the General Assembly for information.

The Chair and Vice-Chair of the IEP will be selected from a country not represented within the RIs providers to avoid as much as possible conflicts of interest. Members take part in the IEP as independent experts and do not represent any organisation, nor can they send any replacements. This means that their work on this Panel does not represent any organisation or nation.

4.8.1.2 Review process

All eligible proposals will be subject to a scientific evaluation by three IEP members, one of the IEP members will be nominated as a rapporteur. They must assess the proposal and prepare individual evaluation reports, in advance of the IEP meeting while the rapporteur prepare a Proposal Assessment Summary Form (PASF). Information about the assessment criteria and scoring of proposals are detailed in Annex B.

During the IEP consensus meeting, the evaluation results for each proposal will be presented by the rapporteur. The IEP will discuss the proposals, agree on the final individual 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, with the support of the TA Management WG and the Executive Committee of the Partnership. In case of large number of proposals received and deemed eligible projects over the threshold will be set by the Chair and Vice-Chair of the IEP to the 'High' or 'Low' priority category. Proposals falling in the 'High' priority category will then be ranked by infrastructure according to their overall score.

The decisions of the IEP should be taken collectively, preferably by consensus or by a simple majority of the panel members in case consensus cannot be reached. The IEP will produce a final Evaluation Summary Report for each proposal, which will be transmitted to the applicants.

In case of a dispute that may occur with an applicant, e.g. in relation to the ranking list, the IEP can be asked by the TA Management WG, if needed supported by the Executive Committee of the Partnership, for a binding opinion.

5. AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE RI PROVIDERS AND THE PROJECT LEADERS

Projects granted for access to RIs need to be concluded within 18 months from the starting date. It is necessary for user and RI provider to sign an agreement for the implementation of the activity, providing an implementation plan and list of duties. The Partnership, through the TA Management Working Group, will assist users and providers in this process.

It is up to the Partners to decide whether to make a formal agreement among themselves.

5.1 Specific Access Conditions/Funding

Access is offered by the Partnership through the relevant Partners being RI providers and making available the RI they operate. The Partnership does not support any costs of the project nor personnel effort/travel/shipping of equipment. Projects activities will need to be self-funded.

5.2 Formalisation of the agreement between the providers and the users of the RIs

Before accessing to the requested RI, the Project Leader on behalf of all Partners is required to sign the user agreement with the RI provider (see Annex D). The TA Management Working Group should also be notified of the signed agreement.

6. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AND REPORTING

For the whole duration of the project, it is the responsibility of the Project Leader to inform the RI provider and the TA Management Working Group about any changes in the project, i.e., modifications of the work plan or the project team.

Any financial issue is under the responsibility of each Partner involved in the selected project.

6.1 Communications, meetings and reports

The Project Leader, on behalf of the Partners, should communicate to the TA Management Working Group the starting of the activities. The access projects must be completed within a maximum of 18 months. They are part of an international research programme for which some joint activities may be organised, with reference to those providing networking and future collaboration opportunities, including remote and in-person meetings/workshops/events and contribution to communication and dissemination. Also, RIs providers can be invited to such gatherings. A final meeting, preferably on-line, with all projects will be organised for assessing the results and discussing how the activity was developed.

Besides this, on behalf of the user team, the PI will be required to submit a digital final access report to the relevant RI provider and the Partnership within two months after the conclusion of the project. A template will be circulated in due time by the TA Mgmt WG, including a few reliable KPIs. All Partners will have to deliver input for this report. The access report should be notified to the Partnership.

The TA Management Working Group will check and validate the report with possible support of experts from the IEP.

6.2 Data Policy

In compliance with the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (2016/679)[33] (GDPR) and with specific regard to personal data, data protection is regulated as detailed in the relevant document published in the EPSS platform addressing data provided to the Partnership and the purpose of processing of these data for (1) application submission, (2) application evaluation by an independent International Evaluation Panel, (3) application eligibility check, (4) monitoring and evaluation of the call process, (5) general use of the EPSS.

In terms of data generated by the projects, specific data policy will be further regulated in the user-provider agreement if needed.

[33] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2016/679/oj/eng

6.3 Acknowledgments and Dissemination requirements

Dissemination of project outputs is the responsibility of the Partners. Measures for dissemination of the results must be described in the proposal and are considered in the evaluation procedure. This can be organised in the form of various communication routes such as (contribution to) scientific papers, posters, course or training material, web-based tools, stakeholders' engagement, workshops, or direct intervention towards end users, including citizens.

Further, the Partners must acknowledge the support of the Partnership under Horizon Europe in any document that is published (in written, oral, or electronic form) within the research project, mention the RI and the organisation that has provided access to the RI. In accordance with good scientific practice, users are encouraged to offer co-authorship to those working at the RI having made genuine scientific contributions to their work[34].

RIs providers and users must ensure that all outcomes (publications, etc.) of TA to RIs projects include a proper acknowledgement of the Partnership. All the publications resulting from the TA projects must be published in adherence to the EC Open Science Policy[35] but for private companies and SMEs.

[34] In line with the European Charter for Access to Research Infrastructures", November 2024, https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/ec4692ae-ac6f-11ef-acb1-01aa75ed71a1

[35] https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/strategy/strategy-research-and-innovation/our-digital-future/open-science_en

ANNEX A – RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURES' PROVIDERS CONTACT POINTS

ANNEX B – EVALUATION PROCEDURE AND CRITERIA

ANNEX C – GUIDELINES FOR APPLICANTS AND PROPOSAL FORM

ANNEX D – USER-PROVIDER STANDARD AGREEMENT TEMPLATE