2nd Open Call

For the Financial Support Programme

Guide for Applicants

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Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are, however, those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or HaDEA. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them. FIERCE has received funding under Grant Agreement 101177496.

Welcome

FIERCE is a 3-year Coordination and Support Action funded under the Horizon Europe Framework Programme (2021–2027), running from November 2024 to October 2027. The project is dedicated to accelerating the adoption of downstream space data and services by SMEs to drive innovation for the green and digital transition.

This document outlines the rules for the Second Open Call participation, including eligibility criteria, maximum grant amount, timeline, submission rules, and the evaluation process.

Please take a moment to read this document carefully to understand the requirements and process. For any questions, please contact us at helpdesk@project-fierce.eu.

Good luck!

The FIERCE Open Call Management Team

Open Call Basic Conditions

Section	Description
Call opening date:	8 September 2026, 13:00 (Brussels time)
Call deadline:	9 November 2026, 17:00 (Brussels Time)
Financial Support Program scope:	This Financial Support Program supports **the contracting of External Service Providers (ESP)** to help beneficiaries design/upscale/commercialise space-enabled green solutions* or even adopt commercially available ones, contributing to the transition towards more sustainable and circular business innovation practices, processes, and partnerships. Consequently, this Open Call targets applicants who are interested in using downstream space data to create solutions that have a positive environmental impact, either: (i) for the company itself (e.g., by improving current processes to minimise resources, waste, pollution, etc.) – **Type A Transformation Project** or **(ii)** for its users (e.g., by creating new or improving existing products for better resource management, environmental monitoring, etc.) – **Type B Transformation Project** Applicants should demonstrate their potential to leverage downstream space data, such as Earth Observation (EO), remote sensing, satellite navigation, etc. The program places a particular focus on supporting solutions in areas such as: ● Improvement of circularity in terms of improved use of resources and waste management ● Safe, resource-efficient, and environmentally friendly management of primary, secondary, and critical raw materials ● Improved environmental monitoring **By "green solutions" we mean products, services, or processes that reduce the environmental impact of the company (directly via the improvement of processes) or of its users (indirectly through green products).*
Max. grant amount	Each selected beneficiary can receive up to 50,000 EUR to implement its project(s), based on the **price (budget) information indicated in the application form** and paid out after successful completion and verification of results against the approved Transformation Plan. <u>Service Selection and Price Quotation Requirements:</u>

In the Application Form, applicants select services from a checklist covering the technical, business, environmental/social, and funding/financing categories outlined below. For each selected service, a budget must be indicated and a short description including the intended ESP must be provided.

The budget must be based on a price quotation from the intended ESP, either from the FIERCE ESP Pool or an external ESP (with references) proposed by the applicant. Applicants must gather pricing from potential providers to reflect market value and comply with Best Value for Money and no conflict of interest principles, which applicants must confirm by marking a checkbox.

Quotations should be uploaded to the application form. All quotations are indicative only and do not create a contractual commitment. If selected, the ESP choice and final budget may be refined during the Matchmaking and Transformation Plan Writing phase; however, the final approved budget may not exceed the amount requested in the application form.

Types of projects:

There are three types of projects to account for the different technological maturity stages of the solutions. The respective value of the services available for each type of project is as follows:

- Ideation projects: up to 25,000 EUR
- Scale-Up projects: up to 50,000 EUR
- Commercialisation projects: up to 25,000 EUR

Each beneficiary can receive as many services as needed, as long as they do not surpass the maximum amount they are allowed to spend under each type of project i.e. 50,000 EUR.

Since the total overall funding limit is 50,000 EUR per beneficiary, Ideation or Commercialisation project applicants (up to 25,000 EUR each) can therefore apply for up to 2 projects.

The applications for the 2 projects need to be separate, and the 2 projects need to be clearly different. Please indicate it in the application title.

In the case that beneficiaries can implement 2 projects, the first one must be successfully completed (Milestone Review passed) before the second can start. Both projects must be completed within the duration of the Financial Support program.

Beneficiaries supported under the First Financial Support Program can apply to the FIERCE 2nd Open Call for Financing, as long as they do not exceed the maximum financial support available per beneficiary (50,000 EUR).

100% of the lump-sum voucher(s) value will be allocated to the External Service Provider(s) (no extra costs are reimbursed).
For value added tax (VAT), please follow the general eligibility conditions set in

the Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/2509 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 September 2024 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union (article 189).

Types of activities that can be funded

Project Type	Ideation	Scale-up	Commercialisation
Voucher value	up to 25,000 EUR	up to 50,000 EUR	up to 25,000 EUR
Purpose	Supporting projects for research-focused activities for new/ immature ideas	Supporting testing and validation of proven concepts	Supporting the final steps towards solution validation
Available Technical Service Types	- Feasibility studies - Proof of concept or experiments	- Lab testing - Industrial pilots or demonstrators - MVP development or improvement	- Full system integration - Scalability testing (industrial or relevant environment)
Available Business Service Types	- Market /Competition studies - Draft business models - Legal, IP, compliance	- Market-product fit validation - Revenue stream validation - Key partnerships development - Early-stage business planning - Legal, IP, compliance	- Full business planning - KPIs establishment - Partners & clientele development - Legal, IP, compliance
Available Social & Environmental Service Types	- Lifecycle thinking - Social needs research/studies	- Stakeholder acceptance studies - Supply chain analysis / LCA	- Full socio-environmental strategy
Available Funding & Financing Service Types	- Co-design with key stakeholders - R&I grants - Seed funding	- Incubation or acceleration - Grants or non-equity funding	- Investments by VCs, BAs - Acceleration and grants

By the end of each project, beneficiaries are expected to have demonstrated a tangible improvement in their Technology Readiness Level (TRL), Investment Readiness Level (IRL), if applicable, and Societal Readiness Level (SRL), if applicable. These three dimensions - technical maturity, financial maturity, and

	societal acceptance - provide a structured way to assess progress and impact (find more detailed information in Annex 1 - Readiness Level Framework).
How to apply?	Applications must be submitted via our online form here by the deadline. If you are not yet a OnePass User, sign up following the procedure outlined on the Open Call landing page on the FIERCE website here. Applications must be in English, and all mandatory sections must be completed. Applicants can submit a maximum of 2 proposals for this Open Call. Proposals can be modified after submission (but only until the Open Call deadline). In the case of multiple submissions, only the latest submission per application will move to the first check of the evaluation process.
Duration of the Support Program:	The program can last up to max. 6 months, starting from the date indicated in the Sub-grant Agreement (SGA).
Who can apply?	Single entities applying as: ● Self-employed individuals[1] ● Micro Enterprises[2] ● Small Enterprises[3] ● Medium-sized Enterprises[4] including start-ups[5] and scale-ups[6] At the time of the Open Call deadline, these single entities should be legally registered in any EU Member State and its Overseas Countries and Territories (OCT) or Horizon Europe Associated Countries, including Switzerland.
Additional conditions related to who can apply	Applicants under EU restrictive measures under Article 29 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) and Article 215 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU) are not eligible to participate in this open call.

[1] *Self-employed individuals (sole traders): Persons engaged in an economic activity on their own account, who may qualify as micro, small or medium-sized enterprises if they meet the relevant staff head-count and financial thresholds.*

[2] *Micro enterprises: Enterprises employing fewer than 10 persons and with an annual turnover or balance sheet total not exceeding €2 million.*

[3] *Small enterprises: Enterprises employing fewer than 50 persons and with an annual turnover or balance sheet total not exceeding €10 million.*

[4] *Medium-sized enterprises: Enterprises employing fewer than 250 persons and with an annual turnover not exceeding €50 million or an annual balance sheet total not exceeding €43 million.*

[5] *Start-ups refers to a tech-oriented company. It should employ less than 10 people (but more than 2 full-time equivalent staff) that has operated for less than three years and has attracted more than €50k early-stage private sector investment or has demonstrable sales growth over 50% pa.*

[6] *Scale-ups, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), refers to those SMEs that have been growing over three consecutive financial years at an annual rate above 20% in terms of turnover or number of employees.*

<table>
<tr><td></td><td>The FIERCE partners and their affiliated entities are not eligible to participate in the Open Call. This restriction also applies to their employees and associates, whether currently employed under standard or equivalent contracts or serving as board members. Former employees and associates are also excluded if they were involved in the project at any stage.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Number of grants and total funding available</td><td>We aim to support approximately 22 Projects in this Open Call.
In particular, we aim to support approximately 6 projects requesting a scale-up voucher (i.e. up to 50.000 EUR) and approximately 16 projects requesting an ideation/ commercialization voucher (i.e. up to 25.00 EUR). This number may vary, depending on the different types of projects to be funded and the actual requested budget.

The total budget available for this Open Call is 694 520,00 EUR[7].

The final number of awarded projects is determined by the total budget allocated to this Open Call and the overall quality of the selected projects.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Ground rules and formal requirements</td><td>When applying to the Open Call, please also note that the following conditions will be checked:
● Submission deadline: Only proposals submitted through the online form here before the deadline will be considered.
● Language requirement: Proposals must be written in English. If mandatory sections are in another language, the proposal will be rejected. Non-mandatory sections in another language will not be evaluated, but the proposal will remain valid.
● Data accuracy: The information provided must be correct, complete, and allow proper evaluation. Extra material provided by the applicant that was not requested in the form will not be considered. Although we may use other resources to verify that the provided data is true.
● Completeness: Ensure all required fields are filled.
● European dimension: The proposal should align with EU goals and contribute to creating a positive impact within the EU in line with FIERCE's mission to accelerate the use of downstream space data for the green and digital transition. The project should address sectoral challenges in FIERCE's focal areas (e.g. circularity and resource efficiency, sustainable management of primary, secondary and critical raw materials, improved environmental monitoring) in a way that can be replicated and scaled at the European level. Applicants must demonstrate scalability and clearly explain the expected environmental, social and economic impacts, contributing to sustainable development, the European Green Deal and other relevant EU policies (such as the CSRD and the Critical Raw Materials Act).</td></tr>
</table>

[7] *The total budget is a subject of adjustment after finalising the contracting process for the FIERCE First Open Call beneficiaries.*

	• **Conflicts of interest:** We will check for any conflicts of interest between applicants and FIERCE Consortium partners. Partners, their affiliated entities, and their employees cannot participate. Each case of conflict will be reviewed individually. • **Financial stability:** Entities under liquidation, in financial difficulty, or excluded from receiving EU funding are not eligible. We also exclude companies in bankruptcy. • **Original work:** Execution of the applicant project should not violate third-party IPR. It must be based on the applicant's intellectual property or the applicant must be allowed to use third-party rights. IPR of the project can not be subject to any dispute. • **Modification of the application:** Proposals can be modified after submission (but only until the Open call deadline). • **AI content:** The use of AI tools to improve clarity and structure is permitted, provided the content remains accurate and fact-based. Applications may be rejected if found to be AI-generated and lacking a factual foundation. All submissions must be authentic reflections of the project, and the applicant team must evidence the technical and operational capacity required for implementation. Providing unverifiable or non-authentic information is grounds for immediate rejection. • **Acceptance of rules:** By applying, the applicant agrees to the terms and conditions outlined in this document.
More info about FIERCE	More information about our Project can be found on https://project-fierce.eu/ The Open call is managed by FundingBox Accelerator sp. z o.o., and organised together with the FIERCE Consortium partners: https://project-fierce.eu/consortium-partners/ All support documents can be found here: https://2nd-financing.project-fierce.eu/

Submission and evaluation process

Our evaluation process is transparent, fair and equal to all participants. We will evaluate each project in a few phases described below. The applicant will be informed about the results of the evaluation as soon as they become available.

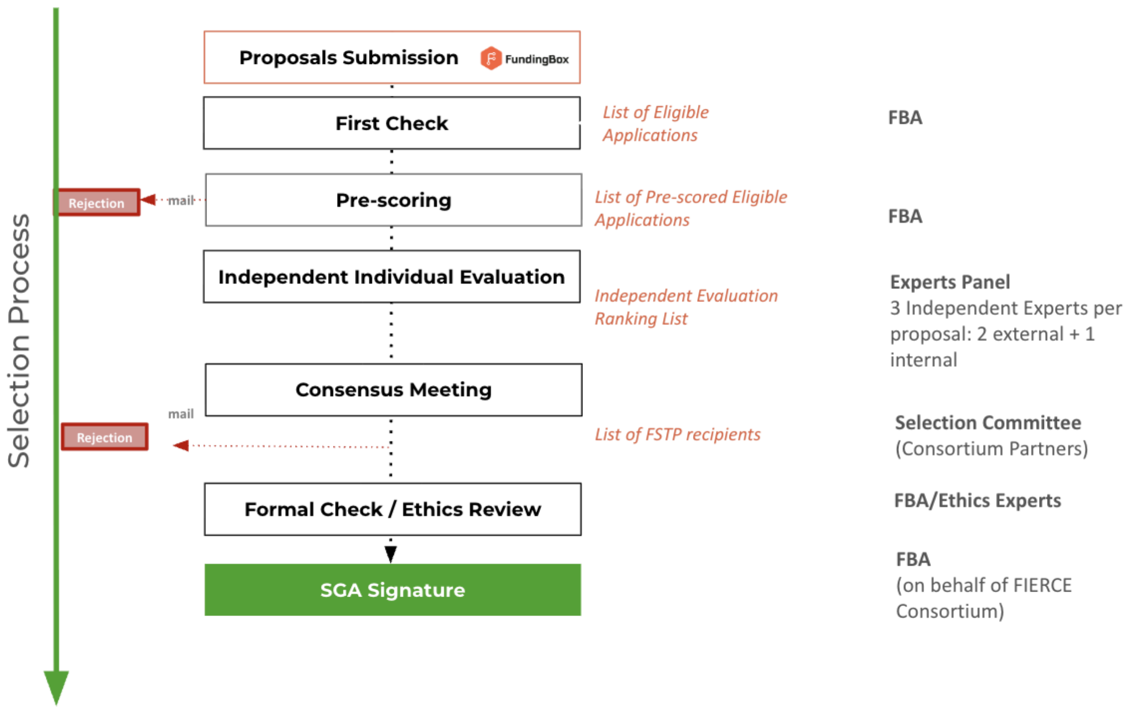

Figure 1 - Selection Funnel

Initial Check

After the deadline, the system will review the corresponding proposals to ensure they meet the terms and conditions previously outlined in the Basic Open Call Conditions above. This check will be based on the declarations in each proposal.

Please be aware that applications that do not comply with these requirements will be rejected.

Pre-Scoring

If more than 60 proposals pass the initial check stage, a pre-scoring system may be implemented. Proposals will be automatically scored based on specific criteria:

- **Excellence** (36,3% scores): Integration of the downstream space data within the chosen project track, Use of data from the European Space Program, Focal area of the downstream space data application, and Participation in the FIERCE Advisory Services Program;
- **Impact** (36,3% scores): Impact within your sector/value chain, Critical raw materials consideration, and Environmental impact;
- **Implementation** (27,4% scores): Implementation of the project activities, Internal staff dedication, Budget alignment with the type of activities.

As an applicant, you must choose the option that best fits your project for each criterion and confirm that all your statements are true. We will check the answers provided during the next phases. If we identify false information, we may reject the proposal.

Your project can earn **up to 110 points**. Following the prescoring step, approximately **60 proposals** will proceed to the experts' evaluation. In particular, the 20 (approximately) best-ranked proposals requesting a scale-up voucher and the 40 (approximately) best-ranked proposals requesting either an ideation or a commercialization voucher.
In the case that the quantity of the proposals in either category does not allow such a distribution, the next best-ranked proposals of the other category will proceed to the experts' evaluation.

Ties will be solved using the following criteria, in order of priority:

- Participation in the Advisory Services Support Program.
- Alignment with the focal areas of support, as described in the "Financial Support Program scope" section of the Open Call's basic conditions.

The **top 60 applications** approximately, will move on to the next phase.

Experts Evaluation

Eligible proposals will be evaluated by independent experts, namely two independent external experts and one FIERCE consortium reviewer.

The project will be evaluated within the following evaluation criteria.

EXCELLENCE will evaluate:

- **Scope.** Applicants' potential to apply downstream space technologies to improve their current processes/ services in areas such as (i) value chain and product circularity optimisation, (ii) safe, resource-efficient and environmentally friendly management of primary, secondary and critical raw materials, (iii) improved accuracy, coverage and transparency of environmental indicators, in line with CSRD principles.
- **Progress expected** in the transformation areas in terms of maturity levels (this refers to the solution maturity expected in terms of Technology, Investment, and Social Readiness Levels i.e IRL, TRL and SRL).
- **Soundness and ambition** of the progress expected are adequately translated into quantifiable KPIs.

IMPACT will analyse:

- **Sectoral impact.** Role-model potential of the transformation process within a given sector or value chain. The applicant has to demonstrate the level of scalability of the transformation process, meaning by not addressing an individual problem but is able to solve a structural problem in a specific sector/process/etc.

- **Environmental and social impact.** The applicants have to demonstrate the project's contribution towards environmental, social and economic impacts to contribute to sustainable development, Green Deal and other European policies.

IMPLEMENTATION will consider:

- **Availability of resources.** Contribution via staff dedication is needed from the applicants' side to carry out the process (the Transformation Plan, created once the applicant has been selected, will include an outline of in-kind/budgetary allocation, endorsed by the signature of the CEO).

The evaluators will score each criterion on a scale from 0 to 5:

0 - The proposal fails to address the criterion or it 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 proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses.

3 - Good – The proposal addresses the criterion well but there are a certain number of shortcomings.

4 - Very good – There are a small number of shortcomings but overall, the proposal addresses the criterion very well.

5 - Excellent – The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion with no or minor shortcomings.

Each evaluator will score from 0 to 5 on each criterion and will produce an Individual Evaluation Report. Once the Individual Evaluation Reports are submitted, the final score will be calculated as the average of the individual assessments by each evaluator on each criterion.

For each criterion, the minimum threshold is 3 out of 5 points. The maximum total score will be 15 points, with a minimum total threshold of 10 points.

Ties will be solved using the following criteria, listed in order of priority:

1. Participation in the Advisory Services Support Program.
2. Alignment with the focal areas of support, as described in the "Financial Support Program scope" section of the Open Call's basic conditions.

Consensus Meeting

The 'Selection Committee', composed of consortium partners, will review and discuss the results of the experts' evaluations, obtained as a result of the previous step. They will reach a consensus or majority of ⅔ votes on the list of proposals to be selected, considering the evaluation scores and scope. The Selection Committee will review the ranking obtained from the Expert Evaluation.

Keep in mind that although the highest-scoring proposals are usually chosen for funding, the Selection Committee can reject a candidate for valid reasons, such as not fitting FIERCE goals and scope, limited potential impact, serious ethical concerns, or possible conflicts of interest. In this case, the choice may pass to the next-ranked proposal. The Selection Committee aims to keep a balance of different types of projects until the available budget is allocated. The exact number of proposals approved will be decided based on the overall quality of the proposals, the value of the requested services, the type of projects received, and the available budget to be distributed.

The goal, however, is to select a ‘Provisional List of FSTP recipients’ of approximately 22 proposals and a ‘Reserve List’.

Results Notification and Onboarding

All applicants will receive official notification of the results regardless of the outcome. Successful applicants will be considered as the provisional beneficiaries and will be invited to start the onboarding process to the program by January 2027, consisting of a Formal Check and Sub-grant Agreement Signature (SGA). Their programme should start in February 2027 once the SGA is signed.

Formal Check

Finalists will undergo a formal check to confirm their legal status and they will be asked to provide documents to confirm all legally required elements, such as (not an exhaustive list): company registration document, tax ID number, ownership structure, financial statements, and Bank Identification Form.

They will also be asked to complete an Ethics self-assessment form and, if required, to respond to recommendations from the FIERCE Ethics Committee.

Documents must be provided within the given deadline. If the requested documents are not delivered on time and without a clear and reasonable justification, the finalist will be excluded from further formal assessment.

Sub-grant Agreement Signature

After passing the formal check, the selected applicant will be invited to sign the SGA with the FIERCE consortium to officially participate in the program.

The signature of the SGA is the initial condition to establish any obligations among applicants and any Consortium partners (with respect to the obligation of confidentiality of the application). The SGA will include a set of obligations towards the European Commission (for example: promoting the project and giving visibility to the EU funding, maintaining confidentiality, and understanding potential controls by the EC/ECA, EPPO, and OLAF).

As FIERCE is an EU-funded project, the consortium is contractually obliged to submit deliverables to the European Commission (EC) to document efforts, activities, and outcomes. The deliverables related to the Financial Support Program will indicate that your company received support and specify the type of services provided. However, no confidential information will be included in these reports.

After Sub-grant Agreement Signature

1. Payment conditions

The grant will be paid in a lump sum. The value is based on a service budget defined in the Transformation Plan. Payment depends on the successful and timely completion of the work plan outlined in the Transformation Plan developed at the beginning of the Support programme. The payment will be made once, at the end of the programme.

2. External Service Providers (ESP) matchmaking & validation

A catalogue of ESPs, containing detailed service descriptions and profiles, is available on the FIERCE website and updated throughout the call period.

If you indicated a preferred ESP in the Application Form (either from the catalogue or proposed independently), this will be used to streamline the matchmaking, ESP validation and onboarding process.

Price indications in the application are preliminary quotations used for evaluation and Value for Money. During matchmaking, beneficiaries may:

- confirm their initially proposed ESP,
- request a different ESP, or
- refine the scope and budget of the services in collaboration with their Lead Mentor, considering that the maximum grant available for the project is the one requested in the application form.

Final ESP assignments and service specifications are confirmed in the Transformation Plan (Milestone 1).

3. Implementation & Progress monitoring

Once SGA is signed, the selected project officially enters the Financial Support Program. This phase begins immediately and can last up to six months. Within the programme period, the Beneficiary shall purchase the services, and these services shall be delivered in full.

A Lead Mentor from the FIERCE consortium is assigned to each beneficiary.

The program is structured around two milestones that define project progress and payment, which will take place at the end of the process, against the Final Milestone approval.

Stage	Duration	Explanation
Transformation Plan (Milestone 1)	1 month	Within the first month of the program, you will prepare (with support of the Lead Mentor) the Transformation Plan, outlining the External Service Provider(s) that will deliver the required service(s), final budget, KPIs, and deliverables for performance assessment. It will also cover any specific Ethics Assessment requirements.

		At this stage, the Lead Mentor will evaluate and confirm the list of selected External Services Providers. The completion of the milestone will be scored by your Lead Mentor from 0 to 10. The threshold to pass the milestone is 7 points out of 10. Milestone review criteria: ● 90% of scores - Overall Transformation Plan quality (placing special emphasis on KPIs and Deliverables) ● 10% of scores - Deadline compliance (maximum duration for Transformation Plan Writing is 1 month after the start date indicated in the SGA signature). Once validated by the Selection Committee, it becomes an annex to SGA, and you will be authorised to proceed to the contracting of External Service Providers and start the implementation. **There is no payment at this stage.**
Implementation & Final Milestone Review (Milestone 2)	Up to 5 months	During this stage, you should contract the External Service Providers and implement the service. The progress will be regularly monitored by your Lead Mentor during the meetings (up to 3 sessions). At the end of the implementation, you must submit a Final Milestone Report. This report provides evidence of results, deliverables, and KPIs achieved according to the approved Transformation Plan. The Lead Mentor and, when applicable, the Ethics Expert will evaluate the report on a scale from 0 to 10, based on the following criteria: ● 90% of scores - deliverables quality and the achievement of KPIs, established in the Transformation Plan and; ● 10% of scores- the deadline compliance A minimum final score of 7 out of 10 is required for approval of the payment. Once the evaluation is done and the result is validated by the Selection Committee, you will receive the FSTP payment and proceed to pay to the External Services Provider. *Note: The project will be evaluated as a whole, and not per each service individually. This means that in cases where*

		beneficiaries have selected more than 1 service / External Service Provider, all services need to be fully delivered.

Contact us

If you have any questions about our application process, feel free to email us at helpdesk@project-fierce.eu

Please note that responses are given individually and do not change the terms and conditions outlined in this Guide for Applicants; they are provided for informational purposes only.

In case of any technical issues or problems, please include the following information in your message:

- your username, phone number and email address;
- details of the specific problem (e.g. error messages you encountered, bug description, i.e. if a dropdown list isn't working, etc.); and
- screenshots of the problem.

To additionally support potential applicants, the FIERCE project partners will provide a range of resources, including an Info Day, a "How to Apply" webinar, an up-to-date FAQ, and a LinkedIn group, "The FIERCE Group - Making downstream space a mainstream place for innovators", to collectively discuss queries. The Info Day and the "How to Apply" webinar will be recorded and made available here.

Complaints

If you believe there was an error in one of the evaluation phases, you may submit a complaint within three calendar days after sending the results to you. Send it to helpdesk@project-fierce.eu in English and include:

- your contact details (including email),
- the subject of your complaint,
- evidence of the specific issue.

Please note that we will review only complaints related to:

- errors in the process caused by our staff,
- technical issues beyond the applicant's control,
- clear human or mechanical errors made by our staff,
- incorrectly marked statements, minor clerical errors, and obvious typographical mistakes.

Please note that we will not review complaints related to the content of the expert evaluations.

Complaints will be reviewed within seven calendar days. If more time is needed, we will inform you via email. Anonymous complaints or those with incomplete information will not be considered.

Final provisions

Any issues not covered by this Guide for Applicants are governed by Polish law, Horizon Europe Programme rules, and EU grant regulations.

We make our best effort to keep all provided data confidential; however, for the avoidance of doubt, you are solely responsible for indicating your confidential or sensitive information as such. Please be aware that your application form will be shared with the external evaluators and FIERCE Consortium partners.

You retain ownership of your intellectual property rights (IPR).

Please be aware that eligibility criteria will be checked throughout the process, including the final milestone review.

The FIERCE Consortium reserves the right to cancel or modify the call at any time, informing applicants accordingly.

Need more help? Contact us at helpdesk@project-fierce.eu, and we'll be happy to assist.

Annex I

Readiness Level Framework

The FIERCE Financial Support Program applies the European Commission's standard readiness level frameworks to ensure realistic project objectives and measurable progress. Applicants are asked to identify both their current and target levels for each dimension:

Technology Readiness Levels (TRL)

TRLs 1-3: Research and Concept Validation

- **TRL 1: Basic principles observed.**
  - **Description:** Scientific research begins with the basic principles of the technology being observed and reported. This is the lowest level of technology maturity.
- **TRL 2: Technology concept formulated.**
  - **Description:** The practical application of the observed principles is identified. The concept and application are speculative, and analytical studies are underway to support the concept.
- **TRL 3: Experimental proof of concept.**
  - **Description:** Active research and development (R&D) is initiated. Analytical and laboratory studies are conducted to physically validate the initial analytical predictions. A first **experimental proof of concept** is demonstrated, often involving basic technological components.

TRLs 4-6: System Design and Testing

- **TRL 4: Technology validated in a lab.**
  - **Description:** Basic technological components are integrated and tested together to ensure they work. The resulting system is a "low-fidelity" prototype validated in a **laboratory environment**.

- **TRL 5: Technology validated in a relevant environment.**
  - **Description:** The basic technological components are integrated with realistic supporting elements. The system is tested in a **relevant environment** or a simulated operational environment. For Key Enabling Technologies (KETs), this is an industrially relevant environment.
- **TRL 6: Technology demonstrated in a relevant environment.**
  - **Description:** A representative model or **prototype system** is tested in a **relevant environment** (or industrially relevant environment for KETs). This represents a major step up in demonstrated maturity compared to TRL 5.

TRLs 7-9: Deployment and Commercialisation

- **TRL 7: System prototype demonstration in an operational environment.**
  - **Description:** The system prototype is demonstrated in an **operational environment** (e.g., in a vehicle, production line, or real-world application). This represents a major step beyond the relevant environment testing of TRL 6.
- **TRL 8: System complete and qualified.**
  - **Description:** The actual system is completed, tested, and qualified (e.g., "flight qualified" or qualified for its intended final use). The technology is proven to work in its final form and under the expected operational conditions.
- **TRL 9: Actual system proven in an operational environment.**
  - **Description:** The actual system is deployed and proven through successful mission operations or use. For KETs, this means **competitive manufacturing** has been achieved. The technology is in its final production configuration and under real-world conditions.

Investment Readiness Levels (IRL)

Phase 1: Conceptual Market Validation (IRL 1-3)

This phase focuses on validating the basic business idea, the problem, and the solution in the target market.

- **IRL 1: Idea or Problem Identified**
  - **Description:** A potential problem, opportunity, or result is recognized. Initial basic assumptions about the target market and customer segment are made, but little to no validation has occurred.
- **IRL 2: Initial Concept Formulated**
  - **Description:** An idea for a solution or a clear concept is formulated to resolve a defined problem. Basic market sizing and preliminary competitive analysis are conducted to assess the potential.
- **IRL 3: Problem/Solution Validation**
  - **Description:** A clear **value proposition** is established. Crucial hypotheses (problem, customer segment, solution) have been actively tested, often through customer interviews and market research. The core concept is validated by potential users.

Phase 2: Business Model and Product Validation (IRL 4-6)

- **IRL 4: Low-Fidelity MVP Developed**
  - **Description:** A **Low-Fidelity Minimum Viable Product (MVP)** or prototype exists, demonstrating the core functionality to a small set of early adopters. The preliminary business model is outlined (e.g., using a Business Model Canvas).
- **IRL 5: Product/Market Fit (PMF) Achieved**

- **Description:** The offering has been validated with customers, demonstrating **product-market fit**. A repeatable process for acquiring customers is emerging. The right-hand side of the business model (Customers, Channels, Revenue Streams) is being tested and refined with data.

- **IRL 6: Core Business Model Validated**
  - **Description:** The overall business model (both left- and right-hand sides of the canvas, including Key Resources, Key Activities, and Cost Structure) is validated with initial metrics. **Defined investment needs** and the initial use of funds are identified.

Phase 3: Commercialisation and Scaling (IRL 7-9+)

- **IRL 7: Business Plan and Professional Validation**
  - **Description:** A comprehensive, professionally validated **Business Plan** exists. Financial projections, team structure, and governance are formalised. Traction metrics (revenue, user growth) are consistent and demonstrate high growth potential.
- **IRL 8: Investment Case Defined**
  - **Description:** The **investor shares, valuation, and expected Return on Investment (ROI)** are clearly defined and timed. An **action plan** for the business plan is established. Legal and Intellectual Property (IP) structures are clean and formalised.
- **IRL 9: Scalable Business Proven**
  - **Description:** The actual system is proven to scale. The company has a **fully defined exit strategy** (e.g., IPO, acquisition) and demonstrates the capability to absorb and efficiently utilise the required investment to achieve massive scale. This level is ready for a major funding round (e.g., Series A/B).

Societal Readiness Level (SRL)

- **SRL 1: Identifying Problem and Societal Need**
  - **Description:** The **basic principles** of the societal problem or need are observed. The innovation concept is identified, and initial reflections on the general societal readiness and potential **ethical or social barriers** begin.
- **SRL 2: Formulation of Solution and Stakeholder Identification**
  - **Description:** A solution concept is formulated, and its potential societal impact is described. **Relevant stakeholders** (end-users, regulators, community groups) are identified, and the expected societal readiness is assessed.
- **SRL 3: Initial Testing with Stakeholders**
  - **Description:** The proposed solution is tested on a preliminary basis **together with relevant stakeholders**. This is the **proof-of-concept** for societal adaptation, gathering initial feedback on usability and acceptance.
- **SRL 4: Problem Validated in a Relevant Environment**
  - **Description:** The problem and the proposed solution's impact are **validated through pilot testing** in a relevant environment (a simulated real-world context). This substantiates the claim of societal readiness.
- **SRL 5: Solution Validated by Relevant Stakeholders**
  - **Description:** The proposed solution is **validated by stakeholders in the relevant area** (e.g., policy-makers, industry associations). Feedback is gathered to confirm the relevance of the solution and its fit with existing societal structures.
- **SRL 6: Solution Demonstrated in a Relevant Environment**
  - **Description:** The solution is **demonstrated in a relevant environment** in **co-operation with key stakeholders**. This stage aims to gain more substantive initial feedback on the practical impact and necessary adaptations.
- **SRL 7: Refinement and Retesting in Operational Environment**

    - **Description:** The project and/or solution are **refined based on operational feedback**. Retesting is conducted, if necessary, in a real-world **operational environment** with relevant stakeholders to ensure full alignment.
- **SRL 8: Plan for Societal Adaptation Complete and Qualified**
    - **Description:** The proposed solution and the final **plan for full societal adaptation** (including dissemination, communication, training, and regulatory compliance) are **complete and qualified**. The non-technical deployment risk is minimal.
- **SRL 9: Actual Project Solution Proven in Relevant Environment**
    - **Description:** The **actual solution is fully proven** through successful implementation and sustained use in a relevant societal and operational environment. It has been accepted by the target groups and is fully integrated.

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