

Guidelines for Applicants to the WB Proof of Concept Project 2020 Call



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ABBREVIATIONS

EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
FAQ	Frequently Asked Questions
IDI	International Development Ireland
JRC	Joint Research Centre
PoC	Proof of Concept
TA	Technical Assistance
TRL	Technology Readiness Level
WB	Western Balkans



PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

This document provides practical information to potential applicants in preparing and submitting an application for Technical Assistance from the EU Funded Western Balkans Proof of Concept IPA/2019/412-593 (EU4TECH PoC).

The document is divided into the following main parts:

- Guidelines on preparing a proposal (PDF);
- Application form (see separate WORD document);

Applicants can also consult the EU4TECH PoC web-site for up-dates: www.eu4tech.eu



INTRODUCTION TO THE WB POC TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROJECT

The Western Balkans Proof of Concept Scheme is a multi-country action, funded through the European Union (EU) Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA). The scheme will provide Technical Assistance (TA) to 40 Proof of Concept (PoC) projects originating from Public Research Organisations (PROs) or, where eligible, enterprises from the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia).

The project commenced activities in early 2020 and will end in December 2021.

The WB PoC Project is being implemented by a consortium, led by International Development Ireland (IDI) with strong support from the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission (EC).

Objectives and purpose of the scheme (2020)

The Western Balkans Proof of Concept Project aims to provide hands on support in taking promising inventions in the Western Balkans to market. The project aims to facilitate the validation (prototype, demonstrator, etc.) and explore avenues for the commercialisation of technologies developed within Public Research Organisations (PROs) and SMEs in the Western Balkans. It will provide a set of specific services that will enable local entrepreneurs and researchers to gain practical experience in technology transfer and maximise the potential of successful technology transfer deals in the region.

Specific objectives:

1. To foster and supporting the development of a healthy technology transfer pipeline in the region;
2. Provide early stage support that addresses the Technology Readiness Level (TRL) 3 to TRL 4 'gap' (Proof of Concept and Validation) between traditional funding for innovation in public research organisations and funding provided by private enterprises;
3. To increase the capacity of researchers and intermediaries to identify a robust route to market and build a strong commercialisation strategy;
4. To contribute to the development of local business angel and venture capital investor base;
5. To encourage knowledge exchange and technology transfer across and beyond the region;
6. To also understand what concrete measures could be put in place to facilitate the growth of technology transfer focused financial instruments such as equity investments.

The purpose of this action is to deliver concrete plans for supporting selected commercialisation projects in the Western Balkans. This will assist in unlocking the economic and social benefits of research generated in universities and research centres by transforming it into actual services and products leading to the creation of new companies and employment opportunities and increased social and economic growth and productivity locally and regionally.

Successful PoC innovations can be commercialised through licenses to a new or existing company or through new commercial start-ups, depending on the nature of the invention/idea, its potential markets, and the inventor's plans for future involvement in the commercialisation. Innovations can also feed into ventures aimed at addressing social and environmental goals including by social entrepreneurs and the voluntary and not-for-profit sectors.

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/99 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence



Focus for the action (Institutional Beneficiaries)

This action is aimed at and open to Public Research Organisations (PROs) and SMEs (Small and Medium Sized Enterprises) based in the Western Balkans provided there is not an existing national scheme that is offering similar support. Enterprises from Serbia and North Macedonia are directed to their own national scheme. Enterprises from other economies will have the availability of local schemes taken into consideration at the evaluation stage. For more on eligibility consult the relevant section below on eligibility.

Focus of the action (PoC Projects)

The EU4TECH PoC action will target projects at the 'Proof of concept' stage (PoC) of development.

PoC is the realization of a method or idea in order to demonstrate its feasibility, or to verify that a concept or theory has practical potential.

PoC sits at Level 3 on the Technology Readiness Scale (TRL) above basic and applied research activity (TRL1: Basic principles observed; TRL 2: Technology concept formulated) and below TRL4: (Technology validated in the lab).

Assessors will be looking for technology or knowledge-based ideas that have the potential to become innovative products and services. For more on types of projects to be supported consult the relevant section below on the evaluation methodology.

Focus of the action (Lead Applicant and 'team')

Assessors will be looking for projects that are feasible in terms of the technical and non-technical (commercialisation) support they can demonstrate and the commitment of the applicants. For more information consult the relevant section below on the evaluation methodology.

Forms of Support

The WB Proof of Concept project will support selected PoC projects through up to 6 different forms of Technical Assistance (TA). These are:

- C1: Technology development and prototyping for commercial demonstration;
- C2: Entrepreneurship support and mentoring;
- C3: Intellectual property management;
- C4 Market analysis;
- C5: Business plan and business model;
- C6: Support to identify follow on funding.

It should be noted that the scheme cannot make any grants or other forms of financial support available directly to the project beneficiaries. However, the project can secure professional support e.g. to produce a prototype or to draft a patent.

Delivery of support

TA will be provided by Experts from the EU and the region. They will use remote and face to face techniques and both workshops, group and individual mentoring.

Time-line

The WB PoC project activities commenced in early 2020 and will end in December 2021. It is anticipated that there will be one call in 2020 and one in 2021. Interested applicants are invited to check the web-site for updates.



PREPARING AND SUBMITTING A WB POC PROOF OF CONCEPT APPLICATION

Applicants are urged to read this section of the guidelines in conjunction with Annex 1: Application form.

Working language

The working language of the WB PoC project is English. All applications must be prepared in the English language. The language of the evaluation reports will be English only.

Eligibility criteria

Main applicant

Applicants for support must name a 'Project Leader'. This must be an individual. Individuals must either be applying from an eligible PRO or an eligible enterprise. All correspondence regarding the project will be made with the Team Leader. Ensure that you are in a position to respond to such communications and to dedicate time to work with the TA team if you are selected. Individuals who know that they will be based outside the WB6 during the project e.g. because they are studying abroad, should not apply to be the Project Leader. The attention of applicants is drawn to the **Declaration of availability** at the end of the application form.

Project Leaders may submit only one proposal under each call. If multiple submissions are made, only the first eligible proposal will be considered.

Applying Organisation

Applications must come from either Public Research Organisations (PRO) or, where eligible, from an enterprise.

PROs must either be state funded or, if private, they must be able to demonstrate that they are not-for-profit and that they appear in a national register of accredited Higher Education Institutions or recognised Research Institutions e.g. a current Ministry of Education or Science data-base.

Small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs)¹ are eligible to apply including micro-businesses and start-ups. Large enterprises are not eligible for this support.

Enterprises from North Macedonian and Serbia: Please note that enterprises from Serbia and North Macedonia are not eligible for this action due to over-lap with existing national schemes. Serbian enterprises are referred to the Serbian Innovation Fund. Enterprises from North Macedonia are referred to the Fund for Technology and Innovations.

Enterprises from the WB45 (excluding Serbia and North Macedonia) are eligible to apply but the availability of similar local support schemes will be taken in to consideration at the evaluation stage.

Other individuals involved

Other individuals who actively contribute to the technical or non-technical aspects of the PoC project may be listed. External collaborators from other R&D organizations or enterprises who will work on the PoC should also be included. Their role in the project should be made clear. Their inclusion will be part of the evaluation by the assessors. Individuals doing routine measurements and testing and / or not actively contributing to the project should not be included.

Eligibility of projects

The WB PoC TA will support technology or knowledge-based projects currently at the TRL 3 stage.

¹ SME definition: A SME will be considered as such if it complies with the Commission Recommendation 2003/361/EC. As a summary, the criteria which define a SME are:

- Headcount in Annual Work Unit (AWU) less than 250;
- Annual turnover less or equal to 50 million € OR annual balance sheet total less or equal to 43 million €.



PREPARING AND SUBMITTING A PROOF OF CONCEPT APPLICATION

Applications must be prepared using the official application form. Applicants must respect the font size and page/ word limit for different sections. Applicants who exceed the limits will only have the part of their application that falls within the limits read and assessed.

Video submission

Applications must include a short (3 minutes) video. This is not submitted directly to the web-site but should be uploaded to a video sharing web-site like YouTube or Google Drive and a link to its location should be provided.

Applicants are urged to ensure that they investigate how to place a video online in good time as the link must be submitted with the application form.

EVALUATION PROCESS

The evaluation process has been carefully designed to identify excellence irrespective of gender, age, nationality or institution of the applicant and other potential biases. The evaluations are monitored to guarantee transparency, fairness and impartiality in the treatment of proposals.

The PoC call is composed of an eligibility check and a single single-step evaluation procedure.

The evaluation will be conducted by independent experts. These experts may work remotely and may, if necessary, meet as an evaluation panel to discuss the final ranking of applications.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Applications will be evaluated under 3 criteria and marks weighted as below.

Criteria	Mark available
1. Strength of the innovative idea	35%
2. Value creation and impact	35%
3. Quality and commitment of the team and feasibility of their development plans	30%

Assessors will also use the video to help clarify the written application but the video will not be awarded a mark.

Assessors will rate each of the three sections as: Excellent/ Very good/ Good/ Poor/ Fail. These ratings carry numerical marks of 5/4/3/2/1 respectively.

Applications will be selected based on the order in which they are finally numerically ranked.

It is anticipated that a minimum of 40 projects will be supported over the duration of the project. However, there is no requirement that all 40 will be selected in the first call and it is possible that more than 40 projects will be selected if TA resources permit.

Only the criteria as described in the application form are used to assess the proposals. Each proposal is given equal treatment and assessors are offered clear guidelines for what to seek in each section to award a score.

The evaluation methodology is outlined below. These should be read in conjunction with the instructions embedded in the application form.



Evaluation criterion #1: Strength of the innovative idea (35%)

Assessors are asked to evaluate the following

If the application:

- *clearly identifies and explains a ‘problem’ that the project will address and a proposed ‘solution’;*
- *outlines existing solutions (current ‘state of the art’);*
- *explains the benefits and advantages that the solution will offer (‘technology benchmarking’);*
- *outlines the benchmarking tests that will be carried out to compare the technical results of the PoC project to existing solutions during or at the end of the PoC;*
- *describes any facilities or resources that might be needed to accomplish this.*

To be awarded the highest score proposals must both qualify and quantify the technological benefits of the idea and make reference to external sources of information to substantiate any claims.

Excellent proposals will also clearly explain why the proposed solution is innovative compared to existing solutions and offer some suggestions as to how the innovative aspects might be protected to offer a competitive advantage when the technology reaches the market.

Evaluation criterion #2: Value creation and Impact (35%)

a) Value Creation

Assessors are asked to evaluate the following

If the application describes plans to:

- *asses and validate the effectiveness of the project’s outcomes (testing, technical reports or any other form of validation to confirm that the solution is effective, efficient, sustainable, etc) (where applicable);*
- *clarify the IPR position and strategy or knowledge transfer strategy (where applicable);*
- *set up contacts with industrial partners, or any other potential users or sponsors of the projects’ results (where applicable)?*

Excellent proposals will look beyond the end of the PoC project and outline next steps if and when the PoC project is successful and completed to move the technology towards an adopter.

b) Impact

Assessors are asked to evaluate the following

If the application:

- *clearly identifies effects or benefits for different stakeholder groups including some or all of society, the economy and the environment (People, Profit, Planet)?*

Excellent proposals will both qualify and quantify benefits and make reference to external sources of information to substantiate any claims. This section should look beyond direct users and address the wider impact of the technology take-up.



Evaluation criterion #3: Quality and commitment of the team and feasibility of their development plans (30%)

Assessors are asked to evaluate the following

- *if the proposal describes a core technical ‘team’ with the necessary skills and experience to bring the project to a higher level of Technology Readiness? (Where only one individual is involved in the technical work, the assessors will make a judgement as to if it realistic that they will be able to undertake the work alone);*
- *if the proposal indicates how the project will be linked and embedded in to the wider innovation ecosystem to support the non-technical (commercialisation) activity;*
- *if the work plan outlined seems feasible and if risks have been identified and mitigated for;*
- *where the PoC project would be able to benefit from the support of WB PoC.*

Excellent proposals will clearly link people and tasks together and identify risks that are specific to this project and not simply generic risks for technology development.

Note will be taken by the assessor as to if the proposal has secured support from other resources e.g. grant finance or mentoring. In this situation the assessor will evaluate if and how the PoC TA could be leveraged to improve the outcomes of the project.

Video

Assessors may use the video to add clarity to the overall assessment and in particular their impressions of the novelty of the idea, the feasibility of the solution or the commitment of the project team.

SUBMISSION OF APPLICATIONS

Completed applications must be signed and then submitted in PDF format before the final deadline to the EU4TECH web-site www.eu4tech.eu.

A link to a location hosting the video must be provided.

QUESTIONS RELATED TO THE CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

An extended set of Frequently Asked Questions are published on the EU4TECH web-site www.eu4tech.eu. They consist of answers to the most common questions on how to prepare and submit a PoC application.

For additional questions related to the call, please contact the project team at: eu4techpoc@idi.ie

POSSIBLE OTHER ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED

Ethical Issues

Some research activities and methodologies may have ethics implications or may raise questions which will require sound ethical assessment in order to ensure that PoC projects supported respect fundamental EU ethics principles.

Please consult <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/h2020-section/ethics>

Research Integrity

Cases of scientific misconduct such as fabrication, falsification, plagiarism or misrepresentation of data will be considered as breaches of fundamental ethical principles and may result in rejection of the proposals concerned from evaluation or from the TA.