



Accompagnamento
per la valorizzazione della ricerca

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Fondazione
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vEIColo

1. Introduction

The vEIColo Call for Proposals is promoted jointly by Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo, through the *Enhancing Research Mission*, Fondazione Cariplo, withing the framework of “*Creating Enabling Conditions for Strengthening Communities*” and Fondazione CDP, through its “*Scientific Assistance and Research Programme*”.

Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo is a private philanthropic foundation of banking origin whose actions are aligned with and inspired by United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. It works for the common good from a humanistic perspective that places people at the center. It supports the development of research aimed at advancing scientific knowledge in support of social well-being, in line with European research agendas. It fosters excellence in training and enhances the value of knowledge generated along these pathways, so that the best ideas can produce positive economic, social, and environmental impacts.

Fondazione Cariplo is a banking foundation that operates in Lombardy and in the Provinces of Novara and Verbano Cusio Ossola. It supports projects with high social value for the benefit of individuals and communities and helps create an environment conducive to scientific research. This commitment is pursued through support for studies across all disciplines, the valorisation of research results, the promotion of human capital, and targeted actions to strengthen the competitiveness of the local research system

Fondazione CDP is a non-profit organisation dedicated to the pursuit of public, social, and cultural objectives, with a particular focus on Southern Italy. One of Fondazione CDP’s areas of operation is “Scientific Support and Research”, which encompasses initiatives to support scientific research and the development of innovative technologies.

Together, the three Foundations collaborate to promote and reinforce their shared commitment to scientific research and innovation in fields of strategic importance for Italy’s future.

2. Context and specific objectives of the Call for Proposals

European Union countries have long faced the challenge of translating the substantial knowledge produced by their research systems into economically and industrially viable outcomes. Despite sustained investment in research excellence, the pathway from scientific discovery to industrial application and commercial scale-up remains underdeveloped, particularly in the stages of consolidation and market entry. One of the main obstacles along this “lab-to-market” journey is the persistent shortage of venture capital, especially when compared with more mature innovation

ecosystems such as that of the United States.

Overall, however, the European Union's innovation performance has followed a positive long-term trend. According to the European Innovation Scoreboard 2025, the EU's aggregate performance increased by 12.6 percentage points compared with 2018, with progress observed across all Member States, albeit at different rates. The slight decline recorded in the most recent 2024–2025 period (–0.4 percentage points), alongside diverging national trajectories, depicts an innovation system in transition, marked by significant diversity, but also by considerable potential for further consolidation¹.

Within this context, Italy continues to be classified among the Moderate Innovators, with a performance level of approximately 93% of the EU average and a fourteenth-place position in the overall ranking. A noteworthy development in 2025 is that Italy has surpassed the average performance of its peer group, reaching 85.9% of the EU average. This outcome points to a gradual strengthening of the national innovation system, which, while still characterised by substantial room for improvement, shows encouraging growth dynamics

The mix of investment and policy instruments deployed by the European Union during the current programming cycle is playing a crucial role in consolidating European innovation ecosystems. In this framework, Horizon Europe (2021–2027) represents the cornerstone of EU support for research and innovation, providing a coherent set of measures designed to reinforce the European scientific base, boost industrial competitiveness and accelerate the economic exploitation of research outcomes.

Operating under the third pillar of Horizon Europe, dedicated to innovation, the European Innovation Council (EIC) has emerged as a central pillar of the EU's strategy to support high-potential technological innovation. The EIC is conceived as an integrated instrument aimed at strengthening links between research and industry and at supporting the development and diffusion of frontier and deep-tech technologies across the entire innovation and technology development lifecycle. The EIC framework is designed to reduce both technological and market risk, while fostering industrial uptake and the commercial scalability of innovation.

In line with this approach, the EIC supports the entire “lab-to-market” journey across the full range of Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) through a broad and complementary portfolio of instruments. The three main funding schemes — **EIC Pathfinder**, which targets the early development of radically innovative technologies (up to TRL 4); **EIC Transition**, which focuses on technology maturation and validation in applied and market-relevant contexts (TRL 4 to TRL 6); and **EIC Accelerator**, which supports SMEs and start-ups in scaling up high-potential innovations (TRL 6 to TRL 8, and potentially TRL 9) — are complemented by additional instruments primarily directed at businesses.

¹ European Commission data from the European Innovation Scoreboard 2025 report.

An analysis of Italy's performance across the three EIC funding schemes shows that the overall national success rate, at 7.9%, remains below the European average of 8.7%². This gap is not uniform, but tends to widen as technologies move closer to industrial exploitation. This data points to areas where further efforts are needed to strengthen the national innovation system, particularly in the scale-up and market-entry phases. Moreover, in the most recent competitive context, marked by a sharp increase in applications alongside largely stable funding levels, a general decline in success rates has been observed. This trend is illustrated by Pathfinder Open 2025, where the success rate fell to around 2%.

It is worth noting that these results are largely driven by a limited number of national actors. A closer look at the territorial breakdown of the indicators reveals the low participation of Southern Italian regions, which show a success rate of around 6.2%³. Data from the European Commission further underscore the need to strengthen the leadership capacity of Italian research institutions, particularly in Southern Italy. Indeed, only 2% of partnerships coordinated by an Italian host institution are led by organisations based in the Southern Italy⁴.

In light of this evidence, there is a growing need to structurally strengthen the culture of innovation and entrepreneurship within universities and research institutions, with particular attention to underrepresented local contexts. This effort entails the development of skills and mindsets oriented toward the economic valorisation of research outcomes, alongside the provision of targeted training and support programs for research staff. From this perspective, initiatives focused on capacity building and strategic guidance on European Innovation Council funding opportunities can serve as a key lever to broaden and enhance national participation, helping to narrow existing gaps and to reinforce Italy's position within European frontier-innovation programmes.

The vEIColo call for proposals intends to encourage the participation of Italian research teams in the funding opportunities of the EIC's Pathfinder and Transition programmes. It covers the whole country, thanks to the collaboration between Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo, Fondazione Cariplo and Fondazione CDP.

3. Eligible initiatives and specific contents of the initiative

The overarching objective of the vEIColo Call for Proposals is to strengthen Italian participation in European calls launched by the European Innovation Council (EIC) under the EIC Pathfinder and EIC Transition programmes, while enhancing the capacity of Italian universities and public and private research institutions to attract funding.

² APRE data; analysis units: EIC Pathfinder, EIC Transition, EIC Accelerator; period: 2021-2024

³ European dashboards data, analysis units: EIC Pathfinder, EIC Transition; period: 2021-2024

⁴ European dashboards data, analysis units: EIC Pathfinder, EIC Transition; period: 2021-2024

This Call for Proposals sets out two distinct intervention streams:

3.1 Stream 1 - Enhancement

This intervention stream supports research projects that received above-threshold scores in all three evaluation criteria – Excellence, Impact, Quality and efficiency of the implementation – but were not funded due to budget constraints. Eligible projects must have been submitted under either the EIC Pathfinder (Excellence $\geq 4.0/5.0$; Impact $\geq 3.5/5.0$; Quality and Implementation Efficiency $\geq 3.0/5.0$) or the EIC Transition (Excellence $\geq 4.0/5.0$; Impact $\geq 4.0/5.0$; Quality and Implementation Efficiency $\geq 3.0/5.0$) programmes, in either the Open or Challenges calls. Only projects submitted to EIC calls in 2024 or 2025 in which the proposing institution acted as Coordinator are eligible to apply.

Entities selected under Stream 1 will receive a grant of up to €40,000. The awarded funds may be used to consolidate research activities, such as advancing the project's initial Technology Readiness Level (TRL), and to strengthen partnerships, as well as the scientific and cross-cutting skills of the research team, with a view to resubmitting proposals to the EIC Pathfinder or EIC Transition programmes.

In addition to financial support, the teams selected under Stream 1 will benefit from coaching and advisory services to assist them in preparing proposals for submission to future EIC calls. The programme, with a maximum duration of 50 hours, will be delivered by international consultants with recognised expertise in innovation and technology transfer, selected by the Foundations. Beneficiaries will be supported in analysing the European Evaluation Summary Report (ESR) and in revising their proposal for resubmission to a subsequent call under the EIC Pathfinder or EIC Transition programmes.

If a project submitted to the EIC Transition 2026 call is invited by the EIC to proceed to the interview stage, it will be eligible for additional support of up to 12 hours, aimed at interview preparation and including a two-hour mock interview session.

Beneficiaries may use the allocated consulting hours until 30 June 2027, and are required to resubmit their project proposal to the relevant European call by 31 December 2027.

3.2 Stream 2 - New opportunities

This intervention stream is intended to stimulate new applications to the EIC Pathfinder (Open or Challenges) and EIC Transition calls for research projects with high technology transfer potential. Eligible projects must designate the proposing institution as the coordinator of the partnership.

Teams selected under Stream 2 will benefit from application-oriented training delivered in webinar format, with modules focused on the various phases of proposal preparation, as well as from tailored

coaching and advisory support. The training programme, with a maximum duration of 75 hours, will be delivered by international experts in innovation and technology transfer, selected by the Foundations. An additional allocation of up to 10 hours may be granted, where needed, to support the definition and structuring of the project partnership.

If a project submitted to the EIC Transition 2026 call is invited by the EIC to proceed to the interview stage, it will be eligible for additional support of up to 12 hours, aimed at interview preparation and including a two-hour mock interview session.

Beneficiaries may use the consulting hours available to them until 30 June 2027, and are required to submit their project proposal to the relevant European call by 30 June 2028.

Please note that Innovayt has been selected by the Foundations to deliver the training, coaching and support activities. Innovayt is a consulting firm active in Europe since 2006, specialised in preparing funding applications and developing business plans to access innovation funding. This company will also be involved in evaluating the applications received for the two Streams.

4. Eligible entities

The following types of entities with registered office in Italy are eligible to participate:

- Universities;
- Public and private non-profit entities that carry out research activities.

All grant recipients must comply, from the time of application, with the eligibility requirements set out in the Articles of Association, the Regulations for Institutional Activities, and the Application Guidelines of the Regulations for Institutional Activities of Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo⁵, as shared with Fondazione Cariplo and Fondazione CDP.

Each Entity may apply for multiple projects and multiple projects from the same Entity may be selected.

There are no restrictions on participation across different editions of the Call; however, each Principal Investigator may only be selected a maximum of two times.

5. Procedure for submitting applications

⁵ Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo: [Articles of Association](#); [Regulations for Institutional Activities](#); [Application guidelines of the Regulations for Institutional Activities](#).

Applications must be submitted through the “OLR Online Requests” procedure, accessible from the Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo homepage. Applicants should ensure they select the dedicated form in the “List of Calls and Requests” section.

Entities submitting multiple applications must complete an OLR for each research project.

6. Documents required and eligible expenses

6.1 Stream 1 - Strengthening

In order to submit an application, the following mandatory documents must be sent using, where applicable, the form made available by the Foundations.

All required documentation must be produced in English.

- Copy of the Evaluation Summary Report of the European project;
- Full proposal previously submitted to the EIC;
- Application form (OLR - Online request) containing:
 1. project title;
 2. project abstract;
 3. technology sector;
 4. description of the partnership and composition of the project team;
- Curriculum vitae of each member of the project team (max. 2 pages per CV);
- Resource use plan according to the form supplied (Annex 1). Please note that the maximum grant available for each project is €40,000, and co-financing is not required for this call. The amount assigned is subject to examination by the Evaluation Commission, which will verify the effective connection of the spending plan with the project needs. In the event of a lower contribution than requested being assigned, the beneficiary Entity may request a remodulation of the activities or objectives based on the contribution assigned. The plan for use of the resources may extend for a maximum of 6 months, with no option to renew.

The contribution will cover the following types of costs:

1. equipment expenses, including software licences;
2. expenses for the purchase of consumables;
3. expenses for third-party services (excluding consultancy services for activities similar to those provided by the vEIColo Call through Innovayt);

4. mission expenses intended to consolidate the partnership;
5. other management expenses (e.g. publications, participation in conferences, any overheads).

If a patent has been filed, attach:

1. declaration of consent to participate in the tender on the headed paper of the proposing Entity signed by the head of the Technology Transfer Office (Annex A);
2. any consent to participate in this Call by the entity or entities, non-profit or private, co-owner(s) of the patent or software, subject of the application and related acceptance of the rules of the Call (Annex B).

6.2 Stream 2 - New opportunities

Applications must include the documents listed below using, where applicable, the format made available by the Foundations. All required documentation must be produced in English.

- Project document (Annex 2);
- Application form (OLR - Online request) containing:
 1. project title;
 2. project abstract;
 3. technology sector;
 4. composition of the project team;
 5. description of the proposed partnership;
- Curriculum vitae of each member of the project team (max. 2 pages per CV);
- undertaking to apply for an EIC Pathfinder and EIC Transition call by 30 June 2028 signed by the Project Manager and the Legal Representative of the proposing Entity.

If you intend to take part in the preparation of an EIC Transition application:

- copy of the project funded under the EIC Pathfinder, ERC Proof of Concept (PoC), European Defense Fund programs, or under Horizon 2020 Societal Challenges and Leadership in Industrial Technologies (Second Pillar of Horizon Europe), or under the Research Infrastructures section of Horizon 2020 or Horizon Europe, in compliance with the eligibility criteria outlined in the EIC Work Programme 2026, which is a required prerequisite for submitting an EIC Transition project.

If a patent has been filed, attach:

1. declaration of consent to participate in the tender on the headed paper of the proposing Entity

signed by the head of the Technology Transfer Office (Annex A);

2. any consent to participate in this Call by the entity or entities, non-profit or private, co-owner(s) of the patent or software, subject of the application and related acceptance of the rules of the Call (Annex B).

Incomplete applications will be excluded from the selection process.

7. Deadline for submitting applications

Applications must be submitted through the “OLR Online Requests” procedure, accessible from the Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo homepage, making sure to select the dedicated form for the Call for Proposals in the “List of Calls and Requests” section and respecting the following deadlines:

- **no later than 1:00 PM on 26 March 2026**, for projects intending to apply for the EIC Pathfinder Challenges and EIC Transition 2026 calls, both within the Stream 1 – Enhancement and the Stream 2 – New Opportunities categories;
- **no later than 1:00 PM on 30 September 2026**, for projects intending to apply for the Pathfinder Open 2027 call⁶, both within Stream 1 – Enhancement and Stream 2 – New Opportunities categories..

8. Evaluation of applications

Once the fulfilment of the eligibility requirements has been verified, the evaluation will be carried out by international consultants appointed by the Foundations.

In particular, applications will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

Stream 1:

- Excellence in terms of breakthrough and innovation of the proposed solution as well as appropriateness of the proposed work plan to overcome the weaknesses highlighted in the Evaluation Summary Report (weighting 50%);
- impact of the project in social, economic and environmental terms (weighting 30%);
- adequacy of the proposing entities and the partnership (20%).

Stream 2:

⁶ Note that the EIC Pathfinder Open 2026 call was already addressed in the previous edition of this Call.

- Excellence in terms of breakthrough and innovation of the proposed solution as well as appropriateness of the work plan with respect to the proof of principle (weighting 50%);
- expected impact of the project in social, economic and environmental terms (weighting 30%);
- adequacy of the proposing entities and the partnership (20%).

Furthermore, during the evaluation phase, consultants may contact applicants directly to obtain additional information relevant to the assessment of their proposals

Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo, Fondazione Cariplo and Fondazione CDP reserve the right to request further documentation beyond what has been submitted and to carry out verification checks and in-depth meetings with applicants to clarify aspects of their requests.

Participation in the Call implies acceptance of the final decision on the selection of projects and the subsequent allocation of contributions.

9. Outcomes and financial provisions

The budget available for this Call amounts to 1,500,000 euros and will be assigned by granting contributions of up to 800,000 euros, as well as training, coaching and support services.

At the end of the evaluation process, a shortlist will be drawn up for each of the two Intervention Streams. In the event of a tie, preference will be given to the project submitted by the youngest Principal Investigator.

If the winning projects were also submitted to the EIC Pathfinder Open call in May 2026, in order to start the activities under this Call, they will be required to communicate the outcome of the European evaluation. Being a winner at European level entails renouncing the benefits offered by this Call.

If the contribution is refused, the Foundations reserve the right to scroll down the ranking.

The selected applications will be published on the website of Compagnia di San Paolo Foundation, Fondazione Cariplo and Fondazione CDP. The results will subsequently be formalised in written communications addressed to the selected entities. Please note that the absence of any mention of a project on the website should be understood as a communication from the Foundations of a negative outcome.

The Foundations are entitled not to allocate all or part of the expected budget.

10. Reporting methods

Reporting on the grant for Stream 1 awardees, as well as on the activities carried out under both Streams, must be submitted through the Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo online platform, in accordance with the procedures outlined in the grant approval letter and its attachments⁷.

Stream 1 awardees will receive 30% of the approved grant upon commencement of the research project. Subsequent disbursements will be made upon submission of the required financial statements, with the final balance paid upon completion of the activities, in accordance with the approved accounts and following notification to the Foundations of the successful submission of the project to an EIC call, within the timeframes specified in Section 3.1 of this Call.

Should substantial changes arise during the preparation of the EIC application compared to the project originally submitted and selected under this Call, Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo, Fondazione Cariplo Foundation and Fondazione CDP — after consultation with Innovayt — reserve the right to discontinue the provision of training, support and coaching services. In cases where Stream 1 awardees have already received the initial 30% advance, the Foundations may also initiate reimbursement procedures.

Extensions will not be granted, except in duly justified and previously authorised exceptional cases.

11. Contact details

For information about the Call for Proposals, contact the Foundations by writing to: missionericerca@compagniadisanpaolo.it specifying the vEIColo Call for Proposals in the subject line.

For information and technical help on how to fill in the forms, please contact:

assistentzarol@compagniadisanpaolo.it.

For assistance with registering on the “OLR - online application system” platform, please contact:

amministrazioneattivitaistituzionali@compagniadisanpaolo.it.

Any further communications regarding submission procedures or clarifications on matters of general interest may be published in the “**FAQs**” section of the vEIColo Call for Proposals on the Foundation’s website, supplementing the information already provided in the text of this Call for Proposals.

⁷ [Guidelines for the Management, Reporting and Communication of activities](#).

This Call for Proposals contributes to the achievement of the following SDGs:

