



Call for Competition

For the selection of SMEs to be awarded financial support under the Alliance Initiatives of the PHOENIX 4.0 Project

Date of publication of the call: **15 January 2026**
Deadline for submission of applications to the call: **18 March 2026**

Disclaimers:

These guidelines set out the rules for submission and selection of the small and medium enterprises (SMEs) financed under this call, in conformity with the Call for Proposals (SMP-COSME-2023-TOURSME). The conditions to award financial support to third parties are explained in Article 9.4 of the Grant Agreement¹, signed between the European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency (EISMEA), and the coordinator ARCTUR Racunalniski Inzeniring DOO.

This call is funded by the European Union. However, views and opinions expressed are those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union and/or the European Innovation Council and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises Executive Agency (EISMEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

¹ Article 9.4 Grant Agreement: If the action includes providing financial support to third parties (e.g. grants, prizes or similar forms of support), the beneficiaries must ensure that their contractual obligations under Articles 12 (conflict of interest), 13 (confidentiality and security), 14 (ethics), 17.2 (visibility), 18 (specific rules for carrying out action), 19 (information) and 20 (record-keeping) also apply to the third parties receiving the support (recipients). The beneficiaries must also ensure that the bodies mentioned in Article 25 (e.g. granting authority, OLAF, Court of Auditors (ECA), etc.) can exercise their rights also towards the recipients.

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1. The call in a nutshell

PHOENIX 4.0 project is excited to announce the launch of its **Alliance Initiatives Programme** through this Call for Competition: a unique opportunity for Tourism SMEs to propel their collaborative project forward. With a **total call budget of over €1,065,000**,² This Call for Competition aims to support **collaborative projects across six European countries/Regions**: Dubrovnik (Croatia), France, Iceland, Kosovo, Slovenia, and Spain.

The **Alliance Initiative Programme** expects to select and give support to at least **45** Collaborative Projects dealing with **resilience, sustainability and digital innovation**, involving a minimum of **60** tourism SMEs, **10** other sector SMEs, and **10** other tourism stakeholders (e.g., DMOs, local communities, NGOs, public tourism organizations, universities, etc). An estimated distribution of 5 or 6 selected projects is foreseen for each of the PHOENIX 4.0 project partners, depending on the regional or national budget allocation (see Chapter 2 for details).

Each selected project will receive funding of **€25,000**, except for those in Kosovo, which will receive **€15,000**.

If your project is awarded, you will have the opportunity to collaborate with other organisations and strengthen your business's **resilience, sustainability and digital readiness**.

The call is open from **15th January 2026 to 18th March 2026, at 17h CET**.³

This document sets out the rules for application and selection of proposals, and the implementation requirements for projects awarded financial support under this Call for Competition. In addition, PHOENIX 4.0 has published Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) page in its PHOENIX 4.0 website⁴.

Participation in this Call is free of charge, and no co-financing is expected from the beneficiaries, as the financial support is provided as a 100% lump sum.

² PHOENIX 4.0 partner organisations reserve the right not to award all available funds.

³ There is flexibility for extending the deadline if deemed necessary by the PHOENIX 4.0 project.

⁴ <https://www.phoenix4tourism.eu/funding-opportunities>

2. What is this call about?

a. PHOENIX 4.0 project overview

PHOENIX 4.0 is a 34-month EU-funded project under the Single Market Programme (SMP-COSME)⁵, aiming to translate the goals of the Transition Pathway for Tourism⁶ into practical solutions for tourism SMEs. **The project's main objective is to support the creation of a resilient, innovative, and sustainable ecosystem to help tourism businesses adapt to today's challenges.** Its mission is to foster sustainable and regenerative transformation in the European tourism sector, promoting digital preparedness, long-term resilience, and environmental responsibility.

PHOENIX 4.0 is led by a consortium of partners from across Europe, which are responsible for the project implementation on a local/country level:

1. [ARCTUR](#) - Slovenia - Coordinator
2. [AnySolution S.L.](#) - Spain
3. [Catalan Tourism Board \(CTB\)](#) - Catalonia (Spain)
4. [Centre of Business Excellence \(CBE\)](#) - Slovenia
5. [Dubrovnik Development Agency \(DURA\)](#) - Dubrovnik (Croatia)
6. [The Iceland Tourism Cluster \(ITC\)](#) - Iceland
7. [Open Tourisme Lab \(OTL\)](#) - France
8. [Prishtina REA](#) - Kosovo

You can find more details and information by following PHOENIX 4.0 on its [website](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

The **PHOENIX 4.0** project includes a task called **Alliance Initiatives Programme**, which aims to empower tourism SMEs by directly supporting collaborative projects that introduce innovative and leading practices in sustainability, digitalization, and resilience.

As part of the **PHOENIX 4.0 Community**, you will have access to the following support (visit our website for additional opportunities and updates):

- Access to training and resources through the PHOENIX 4.0 Academy and Lab
- Expert mentoring and consultancy from tourism professionals and experts
- Networking opportunities with peers and cross-sector stakeholders
- International visibility and recognition for your solution

⁵ Co-financed at a 90% rate by the Single Market Programme (SMP COSME). The regulatory framework for this EU Funding Programme is set out in Regulation 2018/1046.

⁶ For more information on the EU Transition Pathways please visit: https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/industry/transition-pathways_en

Applicants wishing to receive financial support for their innovative projects under this Call are strongly advised to:

- Register in the [PHOENIX 4.0 community](#) and create a profile. Registration is free of charge and mandatory for all applicants.
- Complete the [Resilience Navigator Tool](#). This tool is designed to help applicants better understand and evaluate their company's current status across five key resilience dimensions: Risk Management, Marketing, Accessibility, Sustainability & Social Responsibility, and Digital & Technological Adaptation. Applicants (SMEs only) should complete this tool both before starting the project and after its completion to assess progress and identify areas for improvement.

By applying to the PHOENIX 4.0 program's **Call for Competition**, you will be opting to receive financial support. If your collaborative project is selected, your company will be awarded a lump sum of **€25,000** (€15,000 for projects based in Kosovo) to help fund its implementation.

Funding must be used exclusively for the implementation of eligible activities outlined in the section "Eligible Activities and Costs." All supported activities must contribute to enhancing the resilience, sustainability and digital innovation capacity of tourism SMEs.

On the other hand, if selected, we expect each winner to:

- Demonstrate strong commitment to advancing resilience, sustainability, and digital innovation within your organisation and the tourism sector.
- **Actively participate in the PHOENIX 4.0 activities** (such as workshops, networking sessions, training...).
- Fulfil all requirements specified in the section "Implementation of the Contract."

b. Objective of the Alliance Initiatives Programme

The aim of the **Alliance Initiatives Programme** is to fund collaborative projects that address one or more of the following **thematic topics**, each one linked to specific **challenges** to be tackled through innovation, cooperation, and capacity building. Definition of topics is available in the Annex D.

The challenges eligible for support are:

1 Educate, plan and manage risks to enhance the resilience of tourism SMEs.

- Bridging the gap between theory and practice in sustainable tourism.
- Activating territorial resilience through storytelling, local cooperation and heritage-based experiences.
- Improving energy efficiency and circular practices in tourism SMEs.
- Using data to anticipate risks and understand visitors.
- Human resources and financial preparedness.

- 2 **Shape tourism offerings by considering factors such as seasonality, social impact and challenges to promote responsible and diversified tourism while mitigating the effects of overtourism.**
 - Developing flexible and sustainable offers to reduce seasonality.
 - Ensuring stability and sustainable living conditions for the seasonal workforce.
 - Human-centred approaches to managing overtourism.
 - Collaboration and shared value creation between all tourism actors and across sectors.

- 3 **Develop tools and methodologies to improve the management of tourism offerings and visitor flows.**
 - Optimizing visitor flows through data and digital solutions.
 - Digital literacy and skills for smart tourism management.
 - Improving digital connections and integration for tourism SMEs.
 - Reducing the carbon footprint of visitor mobility.

- 4 **Strengthen knowledge, awareness and skills related to resilience and sustainability among mid-and top-level management in tourism SMEs.**
 - Practical sustainability training and mindset shift.
 - Formalizing sustainability practices and certifications.
 - Digital monitoring for resource efficiency and resilience.
 - Cybersecurity and risk management.

- 5 **Design effective campaigns to raise awareness on key issues such as heritage preservation and climate action.**
 - Credible, transparent and actionable sustainability communication.
 - Motivating responsible visitor behaviour.
 - Designing targeted campaigns to promote off-peak visitation and responsible tourism.
 - Fostering social sustainability and hospitality.

- 6 **Create accessible tourism services to ensure inclusivity for all visitors.**
 - Clear and consistent communication of accessibility.
 - Training and mindset shift for accessible tourism.
 - Formalizing accessibility strategies, plans and assessments.

Further information about the meaning of each topic and examples of the challenges can be found in Annexes D and E.

3. The PHOENIX 4.0 Call for Competition

a. Administrative eligibility criteria

From an administrative point of view, you should first consider the following requirements concerning eligibility of the **participants (1)** and **partnerships (2)**:

1) Eligible participants:

To be eligible, SMEs acting as Lead Partners must:

- Be legally established and registered in one of the partnership countries or regions, in accordance with the applicable national or regional laws and regulations: Dubrovnik (Croatia), France, Iceland, Kosovo, Slovenia, and Spain.
- Comply with the [European Commission Recommendation 2003/361/EC](#)⁷ defining the criteria for qualifying as a small and medium enterprise. This includes self-employed professionals, start-ups, micro, and other small to medium-sized enterprises, or any other entity that is regularly engaged in an economic activity.

✓ Therefore, they first need to be considered an enterprise. “According to the definition, an enterprise is 'any entity engaged in an economic activity, irrespective of its legal form' (European Court of Justice). It is the economic activity that is the determining factor, not the legal form. In practice, this means that family firms, partnerships and associations or any other entity that is regularly engaged in an economic activity may be considered as enterprises.” SMEs must be independent from large enterprises or public bodies. If an enterprise is controlled by public authorities or larger companies, it does not qualify as a SME (EC SME user guide)⁸.

✓ The status of an enterprise as a SME further depends on the following two factors: The **staff headcount** (how many people are employed by the enterprise) and the **turnover OR balance sheet total**. The following criteria are established by the European Commission Recommendation 2003/361/EC:

⁷ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2003:124:0036:0041:en:PDF>

⁸ EC SME use guide available at: https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/smes/sme-fundamentals/sme-definition_en

Company category	Staff headcount	Turnover	Balance sheet total
Medium-sized	< 250	≤ € 50 m	≤ € 43 m
Small	< 50	≤ € 10 m	≤ € 10 m
Micro	< 10	≤ € 2 m	≤ € 2 m

In this sense, start-ups, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) and any other type of SME that fall under this definition are eligible to apply to the call.

Doubts about the SME status may be resolved by consulting the [SME user guide](#) (available in all EU languages).

In case your application is selected, you may be requested to submit supporting documentation to verify your status as an **SME**.

- Operates in the tourism industry, usually falling under one of the categories/ NACE codes or their national equivalents that are listed below. The list of codes below is however non-exhaustive, so SMEs are encouraged to justify in the application form how they operate directly (not indirectly such as consultancy firms working in tourism or providers along the value chain) in the tourism industry, if they are not registered under any of the listed codes.

In case your application is selected, you may be requested to submit supporting documentation (e.g. company statutes, official NACE registration, or other clear proof) confirming your direct involvement in the tourism sector.

- I5510 — Hotels and similar accommodation
 - I5520 — Holiday and other short-stay accommodation
 - I5530 — Camping grounds, recreational vehicle parks and trailer parks
 - I5610 — Restaurants and mobile food service activities
 - I5630 — Beverage serving activities
 - N79 — Travel agency, tour operator reservation service and related activities
 - R90 — Creative, arts and entertainment activities
 - R93 — Sports activities and amusement and recreation activities.
- Have registered in the [PHOENIX 4.0 community](#) and created a profile. Registration is free of charge and mandatory for all applicants.
 - Have completed the [Resilience Navigator Tool](#). Completion of this tool is **mandatory**. Applicants (SMEs only) **must complete it both before starting the project and after its completion**. This will be **verified through checks in the application form and the final report**.

Completing the tool ensures a clear assessment of the company's current status and measures progress across the five key resilience dimensions: Risk Management, Marketing, Accessibility, Sustainability & Social Responsibility, and Digital & Technological Adaptation.

In addition, to be eligible, all applying entities participating must:

Submit a **signed Declaration of Honour** (responsible declaration) confirming that they⁹:

- Have not been declared bankrupt or have not initiated bankruptcy procedures.
- Have not had convictions for fraudulent behaviour, other financial irregularities, unethical or illegal business practice.
- Are not under liquidation or under difficulty according to the Commission Regulation No 651/2014 art. 2.18.
- Are not excluded from the possibility of obtaining EU funding under the provisions of both national and EU law, or by a decision of either national or EU authority.
- Are up-to-date with tax obligations as mandated by their respective jurisdictional tax authorities.

- **Eligible partnerships:**

- Applications must be submitted by a **partnership¹⁰ consisting of minimum two (2) and a maximum of five (5) independent organisations¹¹**. The entities within the same partnership must be **independent from one another**, i.e., no structural, legal, or financial control must exist between them.
 - A **single tourism SME** (as defined under point (b) "Eligible Participants") shall act as the **Lead Applicant**. If the project is awarded, the financial support shall be transferred to this entity, which shall also be considered the sole entity legally responsible before the PHOENIX 4.0 project. If selected, this entity will:
 - Receive financial support.
 - Be legally responsible for the implementation of the project.
 - Be required to formalise a **Partnership Agreement** with the other entities involved.
 - Only tourism **SMEs** will receive the financial support directly. Other partners (e.g., public, private¹² or non-profit entities instrumental to the project) will receive funding from the lead applicant. The overall budget must primarily benefit the tourism SMEs. Please note that a **maximum of 30%** of the overall grants awarded can be allocated to such non-tourism SME partners.
 - Partnerships can be composed of:

⁹ You will need to complete it in the application form.

¹⁰ A template for the partnership agreement is available in the annex

¹¹ Independent organisations are legally autonomous entities with independent governance and financial responsibility among them.

¹² A private organisation is owned by individuals or non-governmental entities, whose shares are not publicly traded on the stock market

- Only SMEs; or
- SMEs together with public, private or non-profit entities that are instrumental for the implementation of the project. However, only tourism SMEs receive direct financial support.¹³
- **At least 50% of the partners** in each partnership must be **tourism SMEs**.
- Partnerships may be:
 - Pre-existing (e.g., tourism company and their local digital supplier), or
 - Newly formed through a matchmaking process supported by the PHOENIX 4.0 consortium.

Partnerships may be either national (all partners from the same PHOENIX 4.0 partner country) or transnational (partners from different eligible SMP-COSME countries). Only partners registered in PHOENIX 4.0 partner countries may receive funding. Partners from other SMP-COSME eligible countries may participate in transnational partnerships as unfunded partners, but cannot receive any part of the lump-sum grant.

Other eligibility requirements:

- To ensure fair competition, each organisation may participate in **only one application**, either as a lead applicant or as a partner, and must not have received financial support under other projects funded by the Call for Proposals SMP-COSME-2023-TOURSME. If an entity is found to be involved in more than one proposal, they will be required to choose one project.
- Note on State Aid “De minimis regime”: The “Commission Notice on the notion of State aid as referred to in Article 107(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union” clarifies that funding coming directly from the European Union, including from an Executive Agency, is not considered as a State Aid. However, it is recommended that each applicant checks with the relevant national/regional authorities whether the same regime is applicable for them. This eligibility check will run through the application procedure Step 1 Registration and Administrative information (refer to section 4. Application Procedure).

b. Technical eligibility criteria - Type of collaborative projects

Collaborative projects under **PHOENIX 4.0** may take different forms depending on the structure and composition of the partnership. Proposals must be submitted by a partnership of applicants (beneficiaries, not affiliated entities) that complies with the general eligibility criteria outlined in Section 3.a (Administrative eligibility criteria).

¹³ See section B for additional guidance on the typology of collaborative partnerships supported.

Each proposal must clearly indicate which of the following **three partnership types** it falls under and demonstrate how the project's objectives and structure meet the specific characteristics of that type.

TYPE 1. Only Tourism SME Collaborations

These projects involve **consortia composed exclusively of tourism SMEs pursuing the same objective** (as defined in Section A.1).

Key requirements:

i) One tourism SME must act as the **lead applicant**, who:

- Receives 100% of the financial grant on behalf of the consortium.
- Allocates the budget internally to the other tourism SME partners based strictly on justified project activities and costs.
- Bears full legal and operational responsibility for project implementation, financial management, and compliance with grant conditions.

Additional notes:

- A template partnership agreement is available in Annex G to formalise these arrangements.
- The collaboration must be well-structured, with clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and shared objectives. The project should promote peer-to-peer learning, scalability, and sectoral innovation.

It is estimated that 8-29 projects shall be supported in this category.

TYPE 2. Tourism Ecosystem Collaborations

This category includes projects in which tourism SMEs collaborate with **broader tourism ecosystem stakeholders**, such as:

- Larger companies
- Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)
- Academic institutions (training and education institution, university, training centre or research centre...)
- Destination management organisations (DMOs)¹⁴
- Local/national authorities, regional associations or community actors

¹⁴ Within the scope of this call, a **DMO** is defined as a public or private stakeholder, an authority that manages a local, regional or national tourism strategy. DMO responsibilities may include, but are not limited to, taking responsibility for the local tourism offer, sustainable tourism planning/development, and the impact tourism has on the territory. The DMO typically also undertakes additional activities such as business analysis, marketing, strategic and policy implementation, inter-institutional and international relationships.

- Etc.

Key requirements:

i) One tourism SME acts as the **Lead Applicant**, who:

- Receives 100% of the financial grant on behalf of the consortium.
- Allocates the budget internally to the other partners strictly based on justified project activities and costs.
- Bears full legal and operational responsibility for project implementation, financial management, and compliance with grant conditions.

ii) Tourism SMEs must receive the **majority of the financial support** to address their needs and achieve the project objectives in line with this call. Other partners may **receive up to 30% of the total project budget** (shared among all non-tourism partners) and may also contribute via in-kind services or consultancy (training, communication, impact measurement, etc.).

Additional notes:

- Tourism SMEs must represent at least 50% of the total partners.
- A template partnership agreement is available in Annex G to formalise these arrangements.
- The collaboration must be well-structured, with clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and shared objectives. The project should promote peer-to-peer learning, scalability, and sectoral innovation.

It is estimated that 8-29 projects shall be supported in this category.

TYPE 3. Cross-Sectoral Collaborations

These projects bring together **tourism SMEs and SMEs/entities from other sectors and ecosystems**, such as creative industries, agriculture, gastronomy, construction, proximity and social economy, textiles... to stimulate **cross-disciplinary innovation**.

Key requirements:

i) One tourism SME acts as the **Lead Applicant**, who:

- Receives 100% of the financial grant on behalf of the consortium.
- Allocates the budget internally to the other partners strictly based on justified project activities and costs.
- Bears full legal and operational responsibility for project implementation, financial management, and compliance with grant conditions.

ii) Tourism SMEs must receive the **majority of the financial support** to address their needs and achieve the project objectives in line with this call. Non-tourism partners may **receive up to 30% of the total project budget** (shared among all non-tourism partners) and may contribute via in-

kind services or consultancy.

Additional notes:

- Tourism SMEs must represent at least 50% of the total partners.
- A template partnership agreement is available in Annex G to formalise these arrangements.
- The collaboration must be well-structured, with clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and shared objectives. The project should promote peer-to-peer learning, scalability, and sectoral innovation.

It is estimated that 8-29 projects shall be supported in this category.

Transnational Collaborations (applicable to all three partnership types)

Collaborative projects under any of the three types described above (**Type 1: Only Tourism SMEs, Type 2: Tourism Ecosystem, and Type 3: Cross-Sectoral**) may be implemented either as national partnerships or as transnational partnerships involving eligible participants from different countries covered by this Call for Competition.

To qualify as a transnational partnership:

- The consortium must include at least two eligible entities from different countries. Only partners registered in PHOENIX 4.0 partner countries may receive funding. Partners from other SMP-COSME eligible countries may join the consortium as unfunded partners, but cannot receive any part of the lump-sum grant.
- All general eligibility criteria (as per Sections A and B) must still be fulfilled, including the requirement that the project is led by a tourism SME.
- The transnational nature of the consortium must be clearly justified, showing the added value of cross-border collaboration in achieving the project's objectives.

c. Type of purchase

1. Eligible activities and costs

The types of activities and costs that can be funded via direct financial support to the collaborative project partnership include (exhaustive list):

- Implementation of **new business ideas**, new products' development, market studies; development and analysis of business plans; intellectual property development; such as consultants, experts, mentors, etc. offering advice on business plan development, business modelling, IP protection, conducting market studies, etc.; such as design, development, testing of a prototype or other innovation measure;
- Design and implementation of measures on corporate social responsibility, ethic and conduct codes; due diligence (OECD guidelines³⁰) women's role in management jobs,

accessibility (disabled, elderly, children), LGBT, socially responsible job offers, value chain integration of social responsibility;

- Digital innovative projects that promote accessibility;
- Acquisition of software licenses;
- Development and implementation of new digital tools for tourism such as artificial intelligence, augmented reality, fine tuning algorithms;
- Entry fees and travel costs to business meetings, trade fairs, training, provided that these are related specifically to the activities eligible for the financial support and they are organised externally to the consortium;
- Certification costs and implementation costs related to the certification schemes compliance relevant to sustainability, digitalisation and resilience;
- Promotion and communication activities relevant to the activities in this list;
- Purchase costs of consumables/goods are eligible only if they contribute to resilience, green or digital transformation, and they must arise from the capacity building actions carried out by the consortium such as training, coaching or tailored consulting for SMEs.¹⁵ A maximum of 30% is permitted.

Compulsory expenses:

- Travel, accommodation and subsistence costs to participate in the PHOENIX 4.0 final conference to be held in Ljubljana (Slovenia) in Spring 2027. Minimum 1 representative per consortium is required to showcase the results and achievements. A fixed allocation of 1,000€ shall be foreseen in the project budget out of the overall grant received.

2. Ineligible costs

- Capacity-building activities provided by the consortium or by the trainers trained as part of activities “Capacity building for key tourism stakeholders (train the trainers)” in WP3;
- Coaching and consulting services provided by the consortium as part of activities “Advising and tailored consulting activities, and technical support” in WP4;
- Services provided by consortium or subcontractors;
- Vouchers or other non-financial support;
- Purchase of infrastructure.
- Financial support cannot be used to reimburse or purchase services from:
 - The members/partners of the PHOENIX 4.0 consortium;
 - Any persons with powers of representation within the SME acting as lead applicant in the collaborative project;
 - Service providers affiliated with any of the partners listed in the Collaborative Project Partnerships.
- Any expense that is not foreseen as eligible.

¹⁵ It shall be understood that the acquisition of licenses, insofar as they are permitted, always contributes to the objectives of the project.

a . Funding scheme

Each selected project will be awarded a **fixed lump sum grant of €25,000** (€15,000 for Kosovo-based projects).

As this is a **lump sum grant**, **financial reporting is not based on cost declarations**, but on the **completion and achievement of the project objectives and deliverables** as described in the approved application.

A breakdown of the lump sum across different types of activities, costs, outcomes, and partners will be required to facilitate project management and reporting.

The funding allocation per type of project is as follows:

A total of **45 collaborative projects** will be supported under the PHOENIX 4.0 Alliance Initiatives, following this indicative distribution:

- **Type 1** – Only Tourism SMEs: **8-29 projects**
- **Type 2** – Tourism SMEs + cross-sector SMEs: **8-29 projects**
- **Type 3** – Tourism SMEs + ecosystem actors (e.g. DMOs, NGOs): **8-29 projects**

Cross-cutting type: Out of the total, at least **5 projects** are estimated to be transnational collaborations, applicable across any of the three types above.

Call is open only to applicants registered in the PHOENIX 4.0 partner countries. Partners from other SMP-COSME eligible countries may participate in transnational partnerships as unfunded partners; however, they cannot receive any part of the lump-sum grant.

Territorial restrictions apply for Catalonia and Dubrovnik, in line with their institutional mandates:

- Catalonia: eligible only for entities with an operational centre in the Catalonia Region.
- Dubrovnik (Croatia): eligible only for entities registered in the City of Dubrovnik, Konavle, Župa Dubrovačka, and Dubrovačko Primorje.

It is estimated that at least **45 collaborative projects** will be supported under the PHOENIX 4.0 Alliance Initiatives, following this indicative distribution:

- **Catalonia (Spain):** 6 projects will be supported by the Catalan Tourist Board (CTB), with a maximum allocated budget of €150,000.
- **Dubrovnik (Croatia):** 6 projects will be supported by the Dubrovnik Development Agency (DURA), with an allocated budget of €150,000.
- **France:** 6 projects will be supported by Open Tourisme Lab (OTL), with a maximum allocated budget of €150,000.

- **Iceland:** 5 projects will be supported by the Iceland Tourism Cluster (ITC), with an allocated budget of €125,000.
- **Kosovo:** 6 projects will be supported by Prishtina REA (REA), with an allocated budget of €90,000.
- **Slovenia:** 11 projects will be supported —6 managed by ARCTUR and 5 by the Centre of Business Excellence (CBE) — with a total allocated budget of €275,000 (€150,000 for ARCTUR and €125,000 for CBE).
- **Spain (excluding Catalonia):** 5 projects will be supported by Anysolution (ANYSOL), with an allocated budget of €125,000.

Applicants are required to complete the **budget breakdown**, justifying how the requested funds will be used to ensure the feasibility of the project and the achievement of its objectives. A **template for the budget breakdown is provided within the Application Form**, and its use is compulsory in such cases. The distribution of the budget among partners must be clearly indicated and aligned with the proposed activities and overall objectives of the project.

The final allocation of funding per project and region will be confirmed by the PHOENIX 4.0 project consortium upon completion of the evaluation process of all submitted collaborative project proposals.

4. Application procedure

You **must apply online** through the submission page accessible at the PHOENIX 4.0 Website¹⁶. Please refer to each region-specific call and its guidelines. Applicants are required to complete and submit this template through the platform to ensure that all information is collected in a standardized format and complies with the legal and technical requirements set out by the call.

The application procedure is organised in **three steps**:

Step 1 Registration and Administrative information

Applicants must complete the Registration and Administrative Information section, which includes general details about the Partner(s) and the Partnership. This step is **mandatory to pass the eligibility check**.

- All required fields must be accurately and fully completed.
- If any information is missing or incomplete, the entity responsible for the call **may** initiate a formal request for clarification or completion (requirement process), in accordance with the call's rules. However, it is at the sole discretion of the responsible entity whether to allow the applicant to proceed with this process. Failure to provide the requested information within the specified deadline, or the decision not to initiate the requirement process, may result in the exclusion of the application from the evaluation procedure.
- The data collected will be handled in compliance with **EU data protection regulations** (e.g., GDPR) and used solely for the purpose of managing the call and grant (see Annex C).

Applicants are furthermore required to attach the following documents to their application using the official templates:

- **Official document confirming the legal status of the applicant** (registration certificate)¹⁷.

The document needs to:

- Prove the legal existence of the company,
- Indicate the name(s) of the authorised legal representative(s): the document must clearly state the name(s) of the authorised legal representative(s), which must coincide with the name indicated in the application form. If the registration document does not explicitly

¹⁶ <https://www.phoenix4tourism.eu/funding-opportunities>

¹⁷ The following document needs to be provided for applicants from the respective countries:

Croatia: Excerpt from the Court Register of the Commercial Court or Excerpt from the Craft Register

France: Extrait Kbis

Iceland: Extract from the Register of Enterprises “Fyrirtækjaskrá”

Kosovo: Registration Certification and Fiscal Certificate

Slovenia: Extract from the Agency of the Republic of Slovenia for Public Legal Records and Related Services (AJPES)

Spain: Commercial Registry Extract – Copia simple del Registro Mercantil

Note: In case of associations, foundations or other legal forms that do not dispose of the respective document, consult your local contact point to confirm which document to provide.

identify the authorised representative, the Articles of Association or Bylaws must be provided;

- Demonstrate relevant powers of representation: if the signing representative is not explicitly named in the registration or founding documents, a Power of Attorney document must be presented;

- **Proof of Identity of the legal representative (ID or Passport)**

Please note that the entity responsible for the call, as well as relevant European authorities, reserve the right to conduct audits and verifications at any stage of the grant management process. Applicants and beneficiaries must provide all requested information and documentation to ensure compliance with the grant requirements.

Failure to meet administrative, technical, or financial requirements, or providing false information, may result in exclusion from the call, suspension of the project, repayment of funds, or other sanctions according to applicable rules. Missing deadlines or failing to respond to formal requests may also lead to automatic exclusion.

Step 2 Technical description

Applicants must prepare a technical description of the collaborative project proposed together with the Partners. Applicants must use the official Application Form (see Annex F) when preparing their technical description. A Word version of this form is provided as a courtesy tool to draft the content offline, since the submission platform does not allow saving or retrieving unfinished applications. Applicants can prepare their answers in the Word template and then copy them into the online submission form when ready.

Applicants are furthermore required to attach the following documents to their application using the official templates:

- **Project Financial Plan/Budget breakdown** (see Annex F)
- Draft Partnership Agreement (Annex G)

All documents and templates are available for download on the PHOENIX 4.0 Website.

Language of the application

Applicants are encouraged to complete the online application in English. The programme is aware that applications are submitted by non-native English speakers; therefore, they are evaluated based on content rather than language proficiency. **Applications submitted in any other programme language are also accepted.** However, if the application is drafted in a local language, an abstract in English must be provided.

Submission of the application

Only the Lead Applicant is authorized to submit the application on behalf of the entire partnership. It is the lead applicant's responsibility to ensure that all partners have agreed to the content and have provided the necessary documents before submission.

- **Deadline:** Applications must be submitted electronically before the official call deadline: **18 March 2026 at 17:00 CET**. Late submissions will not be considered. Applicants are strongly advised **not to wait until the last moment** to submit their applications in order to avoid any potential technical or procedural issues.
- **Submission Format:** Applications must be submitted via the official online submission link on the **PHOENIX 4.0 Website** (<http://phoenix4tourism.eu>). Paper or email submissions will not be accepted.
- **Completeness:** Applications must include all required documentation to be reviewed and assessed. Incomplete applications may be deemed inadmissible.

The submission must be completed **online** via the [PHOENIX 4.0 Website](http://phoenix4tourism.eu) platform before the specified deadline. Once submitted, the application cannot be modified or withdrawn unless explicitly allowed by the call's rules.

The lead applicant must verify that the application is complete and all mandatory attachments, including the technical description and official documents, are included.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to apply early and not wait until the last minute to avoid potential technical issues.

A confirmation of successful submission will be sent via email to the Lead Applicant. It is recommended to keep this confirmation for future reference.

In the event of technical issues during submission, applicants should contact the regional contact point immediately and document the problem.

Step 3 Elevation Pitch at Tourism Transition National Demo Day

The **Tourism Transition National Demo Day** is the culminating **online event** of this stage of the programme. Held at a **country/regional level in local language**, it provides a high-visibility platform where SMEs showcase their progress, innovative solutions, and transformations achieved through the advisory and consultancy services. By bringing together diverse initiatives, the National Demo Day demonstrates the programme's collective impact, fosters knowledge exchange, and highlights alignment with the Transition Pathway for Tourism.

A central component of the National Demo Day is the **Project Pitch**, where applicants for the Call for Competition present their projects to evaluators, stakeholders, and a wider audience. The pitch serves as a key evaluation step and is designed to communicate the project's value clearly, persuasively, and accessibly, not only to experts but also to non-technical participants.

Applicants should be prepared to present their pitch live according to the schedule defined in the timeline (see Section 7. Timeline), which sets out all relevant dates and deadlines.

The evaluators selected by the project, who will assess both the proposals and the presentations during the National Demo Day, will be fully independent from the PHOENIX 4.0 project activities and the applicant organisations.

Format and Requirements of the Project Pitch

Objective

Applicants must deliver a clear and persuasive presentation that demonstrates the project's relevance, collaborative nature, and potential impact, while showing alignment with the overall objectives of the programme.

Content

The pitch should address the following four elements:

- **The problem or need addressed by the project** – Briefly explain the context and the specific challenge the project is responding to, highlighting its importance for the tourism sector.
- **The proposed solution and what makes it unique or innovative** – Describe the project's approach, product, or service, underlining its originality and added value compared to existing alternatives.
- **Expected outcomes and benefits for the market, society, or stakeholders** – Present the concrete results the project aims to achieve and the positive impact it will generate for target groups, the sector, or the wider community.
- **The specific roles and contributions of the project partners** – Clarify how the consortium is structured, what each partner brings to the project, and how their collaboration strengthens the chances of success.

A presentation, such as using PowerPoint or Canva, can be used.

Length

The presentation must not exceed **5 minutes**.

5. Evaluation and selection of applications

Application will go through the following **evaluation steps**:

- Admission and eligibility criteria
- Evaluation procedure
- Ranking and selection procedure

a. Admission and eligibility criteria

Applications will first undergo an initial administrative verification to assess compliance with the eligibility criteria detailed in the **Eligibility Criteria** section.

Provided that the application is submitted within the designated deadline, through the submission platform available on the PHOENIX 4.0 website and includes all required forms and supporting documentation duly completed, it will be considered admissible and will proceed to the evaluation stage.

Applications found non-eligible will receive a rejection letter that will include the reasons for exclusion. No further feedback will be provided in this case.

b. Award criteria and evaluation procedure

The evaluation will be conducted by a **single European panel of experts**, composed of all evaluators appointed by the Project Partners. Each Partner will appoint two evaluators: one internal evaluator and one external evaluator, provided that neither has any involvement in the applications being assessed.

These evaluators must be experienced professionals from the tourism industry and relevant sectors. All evaluators are required to maintain neutrality and ensure a fair and transparent assessment based solely on the predefined Award Criteria. All scoring, ranking, and funding decisions will rely exclusively on these criteria.

The European evaluation panel will meet twice online:

1. **Before the start of the evaluation**, to receive a common briefing on the Award Criteria, scoring rules and evaluation procedures.
2. **After the national evaluations are completed**, to jointly review and confirm the ranked lists submitted by each evaluator.

Evaluations are carried out **at national/regional level**, but under the common methodology agreed within the European panel. Each country/region will produce its own ranking list.

In the event of a discrepancy of more than 30% between the two evaluators, the proposal will be reviewed by an independent external international expert.

The consortium will review the evaluation results to identify potential inconsistencies or biases **within each country/region**.

Passing the minimum score does not guarantee funding. The highest-ranked proposals **per country/region** will be funded until the allocated budget is exhausted.

Award Criteria

Criterion	Description	Guidance for Evaluation	Weight	Max. Weighted Score
Feasibility	<i>Evaluates whether the proposed action is technically, operationally, and economically feasible. Considers the soundness of the approach, resources available, risk management, and readiness for implementation.</i>	<i>0 = Not feasible or unrealistic; 5 = Feasible with moderate risks; 10 = Fully feasible with strong planning and mitigation.</i>	10%	10
Innovation and Creativity	<i>Assesses the novelty and originality of the proposed solution or approach in addressing tourism resilience challenges. Looks at new methods, tools, or ideas that add value to the sector or improve competitiveness.</i>	<i>0 = No innovation; 10 = Some creative aspects; 20 = Highly innovative with clear added value.</i>	20%	20
Replicability and Transferability	<i>Considers whether the concept or model can be replicated or adapted in other regions, destinations, or market contexts, multiplying the impact.</i>	<i>0 = Limited replication; 5 = Moderate; 10 = High transferability with strategy.</i>	10%	10
Collaboration and Partnership Potential	<i>Evaluates the participants' capacity, competence, and commitment to effective collaboration. Considers complementarity, governance, and stakeholder engagement.</i>	<i>0 = Weak partnership; 10 = Adequate; 20 = Strong and complementary.</i>	20%	20
Efficiency and Cost-Effectiveness	<i>Examines the relationship between expected results and the use of resources. Ensures good value for money and optimal use of budget, time, and staff.</i>	<i>0 = Inefficient; 5 = Acceptable; 10 = Excellent cost-effectiveness.</i>	10%	10
Resilience and Sustainability Potential	<i>Evaluates the project's potential to strengthen tourism resilience — economic, social, and environmental — and its contribution to long-term sustainability, adaptability, and digital or green transitions.</i>	<i>0 = Limited or temporary effects; 10 = Moderate; 20 = Strong, sustainable, and lasting impact.</i>	20%	20
Contribution to the Transition	<i>Assesses the relevance, expected impact, and alignment of the project with the objectives of the Transition Pathway for Tourism.</i>	<i>0 = No meaningful alignment or contribution.</i>	10%	10

Pathway for Tourism Objectives¹⁸		<p>5 = Partial or general alignment; contribution is present but limited or insufficiently demonstrated.</p> <p>10 = Strong and well-substantiated alignment, with clear and credible contributions to specific thematic areas and Transition Pathway priorities.</p>		
Transnational partnership	Extra bonus	--	5 points	
Pitch evaluation	Extra bonus	--	0 – 5 points	

Regarding the scoring, note that:

- Evaluators may assign any whole-number score within the full permitted scoring range for each criterion (e.g., any score from 0–10 or 0–20). The values shown in the table (0, 5, 10, 20) are indicative reference points only and **do not limit the scoring scale**.
- The **total maximum score** that can be achieved before the extra bonus is **100 points**.
- Each award criterion requires a **minimum of 50% of its maximum points** in order for the application to be considered compliant.
- The overall minimum score required to pass the evaluation is **50 out of 100 points**. Applications that fail to meet **both** the minimum score for each individual criterion **and** the overall minimum score of 50/100 will be rejected.
- Transnational partnerships and the Pitch evaluation may award additional points, meaning that the maximum possible final score is **110 points**.

¹⁸ The main objectives of the **EU Transition Pathway for tourism** are: Ensure tourism respects environmental limits and delivers lasting social and economic benefits; Accelerate carbon- and resource-efficiency via energy savings, waste reduction and renewables; Embed circularity across value chains to minimise waste, water and material use; Boost digital capacities of SMEs and destinations through data sharing and tech-enabled services; Strengthen resilience against shocks (e.g. health crises, extreme weather) via diversification and accessibility; Develop green and digital skills to equip tourism professionals and foster attractive career paths.

c. Ranking and selection procedure:

Ranking:

Following the evaluation based on the award criteria, all eligible applications will first be ranked in a single European-wide scoreboard to ensure fairness.

Rule 1: Ranking is done based on the overall score obtained after the evaluation.

Rule 2: If there are applications in the same position of the list, priority will be given to applications that have a higher scoring in the criterion '**Resilience and Sustainability Potential**'.

Rule 3: If there are applications in the same position of the list after rule 1 and 2, priority will be given to applications that have a higher scoring in the criteria '**Collaboration and Partnership Potential**'.

Rule 4: If there are applications in the same position of the list after rule 1, 2 and 3, priority will be given to applications that have a higher scoring in '**Innovation and Creativity**'.

Rule 5: In case following rule 4 there are proposals with the same score, priority will be given to the proposal that has been submitted earlier according to the time stamp of the latest submission of the proposal as registered in the online application form.

Selection:

The applications evaluated will be divided by country/region of the partners. Each partner will select the top projects up to the estimated number of grants indicated in the table below. If the number of eligible and high-quality applications is lower than the estimated allocation for a given country/region, the PHOENIX 4.0 project may decide to re-open the call at a later stage to allocate any remaining funds.

Country / Region	Total Projects
Catalonia (Spain)	6
Dubrovnik (Croatia)	6
France	6
Iceland	5
Kosovo	6
Slovenia	11
Spain (excluding Catalonia)	5

Partners and evaluators shall ensure that there is at least one project per type in their list.

Evaluators and representatives of the project partners will meet online to take the final decisions on the selected projects.

If a country/region receives fewer eligible and high-quality applications than its estimated allocation, the call may be re-opened. Any remaining funds may then be reassigned to projects from other countries/regions based on their position in the overall European ranking.

At the end, a **minimum of 45 collaborative projects** will be selected to participate in the Alliance Initiatives. The applications that are not within the selected projects will be placed in a reserve list. Should any selected applicants withdraw, those on the reserve list will have the opportunity to join the programme.

d. Transparency, absence of conflict of interest, equal treatment and non-discrimination

The selection and evaluation process under the Call for Competition will be conducted with full transparency, ensuring equal treatment for all applicants. All evaluators will be required to submit a formal declaration of no conflict of interest, certifying their impartiality and independence throughout the process.

The evaluation follows an independent review system designed to guarantee fair and unbiased assessment of all proposals. PHOENIX 4.0 is committed to non-discrimination; all applications will be assessed solely based on their quality, feasibility, and alignment with the objectives of the Call for Competition, regardless of the applicant's nationality, background, or other unrelated characteristics.

Redress procedure:

All eligible applicants will receive an email notification of the evaluation outcome, indicating whether their proposal has been selected for funding, together with a short clarification of the results. The list of selected proposals will be published on the PHOENIX 4.0 website.

Applicants who wish to obtain additional information about their evaluation may submit a written request within 10 working days from the date of the notification. Upon request, the applicant will receive an anonymised detailed evaluation letter, including evaluator comments and the justification for the scoring.

No requests submitted after the 10-working-day deadline will be considered.

6. Post-Award process

Once applications pass the evaluation stage and are selected, the Lead applicant will be invited to sign a Consortium Agreement and a Grant Contract. The objective of this contract is to make sure that the legal requirements of this Call for Competition are respected.

a. Preparation of the Contract

After notification, the Contract preparation phase is launched and applicants must be prepared to amend their application based on the Evaluation Report's feedback, if applicable. Amendments will only aim to clarify the deliverables and expected achievements of the collaborative project outlined in the applications.

Contract signature

Administrative duties:

To validate the status of selected SMEs and proceed with contract signature, the following documentation will be required:

- **SME Declaration Form:** signed and stamped (if applicable) by the SME, confirming it qualifies as an SME (see Section 1).
- **Additional Supporting Documentation:** where employee numbers and/or ownership are unclear, documents such as payroll details, annual reports, or national/regional association records must be provided to verify headcount and ownership.
- **Financial Identification Form:** a document verifying the SME's bank account information, signed by both the SME's legal representative and the bank representative.
- **Valid VAT Number:** applicants must provide a valid VAT number at the time of contract signature. Failure to do so will result in automatic rejection of the application.¹⁹
- **Signed Partnership Agreement** (template available in the application package)

Applicants will be informed of the deadline to submit these documents in the results notification. A minimum period of 5 working days will be granted. Failure to submit the required documentation within this period will result in automatic rejection, and the next application on the reserve list will be invited.

Any falsification or misrepresentation of documents will lead to immediate disqualification and potential legal action.

The awarding authority is not responsible for any errors in the banking information provided; accuracy is the sole responsibility of the applicant.

Signature of the contract:

¹⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/vies/-/faq

After submission and review of the required documentation listed above, applicants will be invited to sign the contract with the Regional Contact Point. By signing the contract, applicants formally accept the grant and agree to implement the project under their own responsibility, in full compliance with the contract's terms, conditions, and obligations.

The contract signature is a prerequisite for any payment to be made, as detailed in the subsection **Contract Implementation**. Additionally, the contract will be adapted to reflect participation in specific funding windows and may be subject to an addendum should the enterprise progress through different project stages.

b. Implementation of the Contract

The estimated date for starting the project is **1st July 2026** (tentative), and the maximum duration is expected to last 9 months (**31st March 2027**)²⁰

Payment conditions:

The payment scheme will consist of two instalments done at the signature of the contract for 40% and after the approval of the final report for the final balance (equal or less than 60% depending on performance and quality of the deliverables committed, see Reporting Procedures).

The grant will be provided as a **lump sum**, meaning financial reporting is based on the completion and achievement of project objectives and deliverables outlined in the approved application, rather than on detailed cost declarations.

By the end of the project, applicants must submit final deliverables and outputs consistent with those committed in their application (including the expenditure used and complementary budget breakdown, if applicable). Examples may include:

- A resilience strategy developed and implemented
- A completed sustainability plan
- A functioning digital tool or platform
- A market analysis and business plan
- Any other clear, verifiable results relevant to the project objectives

Important: Submission of all final deliverables is mandatory to receive the final payment. The initial payment is only made upfront upon contract signature.

Reporting procedures:

Throughout the project implementation period, applicants may be required to supply documentation and information at any time to facilitate the monitoring of the project in

²⁰ There is flexibility for extending the deadline if deemed necessary by the PHOENIX 4.0 project.

accordance with the contract. Such requirements might take the form of a brief questionnaire and/or a simple request for documentation.

At least, you will be asked to provide:

- **Inception questionnaire**, to be completed two months after the project start date (September 2026);
- **Mid-term questionnaire and personal interview**, to be completed four months after the project start date (November 2026);
- **Final Report**, to be provided within one month after finishing the project, including proof of the deliverables committed in your application.

The supply of the required documentation is a condition to activate the payment of the final balance of the grant (lump sum). Payments will be made only after a positive assessment of the submitted documentation.

It is strongly advisable to maintain proper accountability by retaining records of all invoices, irrespective of whether the financial support is provided as a lump sum.

Noncompliance with the committed activities and deliverables may initiate a recovery procedure for the granted funds. The terms are clearly outlined in the template of the Contract, under Annex F.

Transition Pathway for Tourism Pledges & Commitments

Each project consortium will be asked to choose to include its project and results thematically into at least one of the categories of the Transition Pathway for Tourism.

7. Timeline

Below, you can find a table with key dates associated with the Call and implementation of resilient projects:

TIMELINE of the PHOENIX 4.0 Alliance Initiatives		
Event	Date	Description
Opening of the Call for the selection of collaborative projects	15 th January 2026	The date when the submission page is accessible at the PHOENIX 4.0 Website for online application.
Info Session (Seminar) of the Call for the selection of collaborative projects	To be coordinated within Lab Academy	International Webinar informative session for potential applicants to explain all the details of the programme, online live & recording available on the Phoenix 4.0 Connect
Individual consultations on how to prepare and submit the project proposal, finding partners, etc	the whole duration of the open call	Project partners will offer individual support to the applicants (individual tourism SMEs and/or collaborative projects consortium) as they will be 100% excluded from the project evaluation.
Deadline for submitting your application	18 th March 2026, 17:00 CET	Final date for submitting your application. Late submissions will not be accepted.
National Demo days pitch	March 2026	Elevation pitch where admitted applicants explain their projects, organized by each project partner (e.g. 2 in Slovenia and in Spain)
Evaluation phase	1 month (March/April)	The PHOENIX 4.0 team evaluates the collaborative projects received.
Notification of the results	April 2026	Date when you will be notified by Email
Contract signature	May/June 2026	Contracts signed with the lead tourism SME
Communication and resolution	May/June 2026	Results published in the PHOENIX 4.0 website and on social media of your application results after evaluation
First instalment (40%) paid upfront	May/June 2026 (max. 30 days after the grant contract signature)	40 % of the grant transferred to the Lead Tourism SMEs
Project Starts	July 2026	Official start date for selected resilient projects
Inception questionnaire	September 2026	Inception questionnaire
Mid-term questionnaire	November 2026	Mid-term questionnaire and personal interview
Transition Pathway for Tourism Pledges & Commitments	March 2027	Submitting at least one of the pledges to the Transition Pathway for Tourism objectives, detailing the description, achievements, short & long term goals.
Phoenix 4.0 Final Conference	Spring 2027	Each collaborative project will be invited to participate at the final conference (min 1 representative per consortium required) to showcase the results and achievements. The event will also serve for networking. The grant should cover this cost.
Project Ends	March 2027	Final month of implementation.

