PARTNER SEARCH FORM
for
Digital Europe Programme (DEP)

☒ **I offer my expertise to participate as a Partner in a DEP Project**
☐ **I am planning to coordinate a Project and I am looking for Project Partners**

TOPICS OF INTEREST

- TOPIC IDs: DIGITAL-2026-SKILLS-09-LEAGUE-OF-ACADEMIES; ELEVATE: European League of Advanced Digital Skills Academies
- TOPIC Deadline: 3.03.2026
- Deadline for the expressions of interest: 3.02.2026

PARTNER INFORMATION

- **Description of the Legal Entity:**
    - Higher Education ☐
    - Research Institution ☐
    - Public Administration ☐
    - Industry / SME ☐
    - NGO X
    - Other: ☐

    Please specify:

- **Description and expertise of the team:**

NALED (National Alliance for Local Economic Development) is a non-profit, independent, membership-based organization established in the Republic of Serbia in 2006, with nearly two decades of experience supporting public sector reform, digital transformation, and local economic development in Serbia and the Western Balkans. As the largest public-private association in Serbia NALED gathers more than 330 members (businesses, municipalities, academia and CSOs) and collaborates with over 100 national and international institutions with the mission to create a better business environment and foster sustainable development. The organization collaborates closely with national and local authorities, academic institutions, business associations, SMEs, and international partners to enhance governance, strengthen digital capacities, and promote skills development in line with EU policies and programmes. NALED's Executive Office team has substantial expertise in policy analysis, project coordination, implementation, and evaluation, as well as in the dissemination of results through extensive networks of public and private stakeholders. The team is highly skilled in enhancing digital capacities and implementing digital solutions, including e-Government initiatives and the delivery of electronic services. The team also have strong expertise in data collection and analysis related to local development and skills needs, as well as in the design and organization of trainings, workshops, conferences, and online learning activities.

In addition to its strong track record in public sector reform and digital transformation, NALED brings specific expertise directly aligned with the objectives of the European League of Advanced Digital Skills Academies (ELEVATE), particularly in the areas of coordination, capacity building, multi-stakeholder governance, and market intelligence related to digital skills. This way NALED contributes to strengthening an enabling environment for advanced digital skills development, supporting high-quality training offers, fostering cross-sectoral collaboration, and bridging policy, education, innovation, and practice.

NALED's contribution in the field of advanced digital skills and digital transformation is structured around the following complementary pillars:

1) Evidence-based policy research and analysis for digital transformation

NALED has expertise in conducting evidence-based policy research, designing and implementing analytical tools, and monitoring mechanisms that support evidence-based policymaking in digitalization. A flagship example is the **EU-funded LEI - Local e-Government Index** (https://lei.rs/), the first composite tool in Serbia for assessing local governments' readiness for digitalisation across key dimensions such as availability of digital services, data openness, interoperability, information security, and citizen participation. LEI enables systematic identification of gaps, benchmarking, and progress tracking in e-Government development, contributing to transparency, accountability, and improved public service delivery. The tool was formally recognized by the Government of Serbia and integrated into the Programme for eGovernment Development until 2030, ensuring its institutional relevance and sustainability.

2) Capacity building and training delivery for digital skills and e-Government

NALED has extensive experience in designing and delivering targeted capacity building programmes for public administrations, civil society organisations, and other ecosystem actors involved in digital transformation. Within the **LEI** framework, NALED delivered capacity building activities for more than 100 public officials from 47 local self-government units, supporting the adoption of digital public services and the transition towards digital-by-default administration. In parallel, NALED organised trainings and workshops for representatives of 70 civil society organisations focused on e-Government, information security and personal data protection, empowering CSOs and citizens to actively monitor and contribute to the development of digital public services at local level. Building on this experience, NALED will further strengthen its focus on **digital skills development for citizens and civil society in the coming period**, notably through the EU-funded DIGIT – Democratic Innovation for Governance, Inclusion and Transparency project. NALED's activities will prioritize **hands-on, user-oriented trainings** enabling citizens to confidently access and use digital public services, with special attention to **vulnerable and underrepresented groups** (including NEET youth, elderly persons, rural women and persons with disabilities). In parallel, targeted capacity building and support for civil society organisations will strengthen their role as multipliers, supporting citizens in using e-services and contributing to monitoring and improving digital public service delivery.

3) Multi-stakeholder platforms and governance models for digital transformation
A core strength of NALED lies in establishing and managing sustainable multi-stakeholder platforms that bring together government, academia, business, civil society, and international partners. In the area of digitalisation, NALED coordinates the **E-Government Alliance** , a national platform that connects public institutions, ICT companies, experts, and academia to jointly

advance digital public services, interoperability, data-driven governance, and digital skills within the public sector. This experience directly supports the ELEVATE objective of building a sustainable, inclusive governance structure for advanced digital skills academies and initiatives at European level.

4) Bridging digital skills, innovation and practice

NALED actively supports the transformation of knowledge, research outputs, and innovative ideas into practical solutions and scalable initiatives. Through initiatives such as **StarTech** and the **Empower Innovation**, NALED supports startups, innovators, and researchers in applying digital and deep-tech solutions in operational and market-oriented contexts, strengthening links between education, research, industry, and public sector needs. This approach is further reinforced through **Capital Innovation Point Serbia (CIPS)**, which operates as part of the **European Digital Innovation Hub (EDIH) network** and connects local and national actors with the pan-European ecosystem. CIPS provides integrated support to startups, MSMEs and public sector organisations in areas such as artificial intelligence, high-performance computing, cybersecurity and advanced digital skills. In this way, NALED also facilitates knowledge exchange, stakeholder collaboration, and the scaling of innovative solutions across Europe.

5) European networking and integration into EU innovation and skills ecosystems

As the **official EIT Food Hub (2024 – 2025) and EIT Community Hub for Serbia**, NALED plays a key role in connecting local researchers, innovators, startups, and institutions with European Knowledge and Innovation Communities. This positioning enables NALED to contribute to European-level coordination, dissemination, and community-building activities, and to support the integration of national and regional stakeholders into EU-wide digital skills and innovation ecosystems, in line with the League's objectives.

- **Potential role in the project:**
    - Technology provider   ☐
    - Data provider   ☐
    - Research   X
    - Training   X
    - Dissemination   X
    - Other: ☐

    Please specify:

    Expertise / competence needed in case of searching for Project Partners:

    NALED is seeking a project coordinator with demonstrated experience in leading large-scale projects under the Digital Europe Programme, preferably a higher education institution or research organisation, with proven expertise in curriculum development, advanced digital skills training, and management of large international consortia. The coordinator should be able to oversee, in cooperation with project partners, the design and delivery of learning frameworks, training activities, quality assurance and evaluation mechanisms, quality control, and dissemination of results across multiple partners and countries.

- **Other areas of interest for collaboration:**

NALED is interested in collaborating with the project coordinator and partners, primarily contributing to research, capacity building, and dissemination activities. In cooperation with the coordinator and academic partners, NALED can also support co-creating curricula, piloting innovative training formats, and contributing to evaluation and policy dialogue on digital skills. In addition, NALED can facilitate multi-stakeholder engagement and outreach by linking academic and training activities with public sector institutions, industry, SMEs, civil society and policymakers, ensuring that project outputs are grounded in real-world needs and contribute to sustainable uptake and policy impact.

- **Already experience in EU funded projects as a:**
    - Coordinator: X YES   ☐ NO
    - Partner: X YES   ☐ NO

- **Project experience and track record:**

With a portfolio of more than 240 successfully implemented projects funded by the EU, SIDA, GIZ, EBRD, World Bank and others, NALED has proven technical expertise, management capacity, and the ability to mobilize diverse stakeholders around complex reforms in local governance, competitiveness, and service delivery. In particular, NALED has extensive experience in implementing and coordinating EU-funded and international projects in the fields of digital skills, e-Government, smart cities, public administration reform, and local capacity building. Selected relevant projects include:

- CIPS EDIH – European Digital Innovation Hub (Partner, EC DEP, 2024–2028, €373.649) Contribution to digital skills development, digital transformation of SMEs and public institutions, and strengthening innovation ecosystems at national and pan-European levels, through advisory services, training, and stakeholder engagement.
- Champions of Digital Transformation (Partner, 2025–2026, UNDP, $150,000) Support to digital transformation and digital maturity of 10 local self-governments through structured training programmes, mentoring, and assessment of digital readiness.
- Towards Smart, Green and Liveable Cities in Serbia (Partner, GIZ, 2024–2027, €595,562) Focused on strengthening local capacities for smart city development by integrating digital solutions, green technologies, and data-driven decision-making. The project supports local authorities through training, policy development, and pilot initiatives related to digital urban services and sustainable city management.
- Enhancing Competitiveness through More Effective Public Procurement and Sustainable Supply Chains (Coordinator, SIDA, 2024-2028, €7,087,370) Large-scale project aimed at strengthening institutional capacities through digitalisation of public procurement systems, development of e-tools, training programmes for public officials, and promotion of transparent, efficient, and digitally enabled procurement processes. The project also focuses on developing sustainable supply chains by integrating ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) standards, supporting businesses and public institutions to manage and monitor their supply chains responsibly, enhance competitiveness, and ensure long-term sustainability through innovative and transparent practices.
- Improved Competitiveness through Better Governance and More Effective Public Procurement (Coordinator, €1,998,785, Sida, 2022–2024) Strengthened capacities of public institutions and local governments through e-Government solutions, digital public procurement tools, and training of officials.

- Local e-Governance Index (LEI) (Coordinator, €260,941, EU Civil Society Facility, 2021–2023)
  Developed a comprehensive monitoring and benchmarking mechanism for digitalisation at the municipal level, combined with training programmes on e-Government tools for local officials and civil society organisations.
- Small and Powerful – Women and Small Businesses Empowerment Programme (Coordinator, €353,991, FCDO, 2024–2026)
  Strengthening digital, entrepreneurial, and financial skills of women entrepreneurs through tailored training and mentoring programmes.
- Together for Cultural Tourism (Coordinator, €322,205, EC CBC, 2023–2025)
  Cross-border project using digital tools for training, promotion, and development of cultural tourism products.
- EIT Food Hub Serbia (Coordinator, €120,000, EIT Food, 2024–2025)
- The project connects Serbian entrepreneurs and start-ups with a European network of companies, universities, and research organizations, supporting idea-to-market development through training, mentoring, and tailored programs. It promotes sustainable food innovations and supports start-ups and women entrepreneurs in agriculture, contributing to a more resilient and competitive agri-food sector. EIT Community Hub Serbia (Coordinator, €34,485, European Institute of Innovation & Technology, 2025)
  The project establishes a national EIT Community Hub as a central platform that connects the Serbian innovation ecosystem with the broader European network of the European Institute of Innovation & Technology (EIT). It brings together start-ups, researchers, universities, industry partners and public institutions to facilitate access to EIT programmes, funding, expertise and pan-European networks, supporting collaboration, innovation and economic growth.
- Technical Assistance for e-Delivery of Acts and Requests (Partner, €68,000, 2020–2021, EBRD)
  Support to the implementation of e-Government communication systems between citizens and public administration in 144 local self-governments.

CONTACT DETAILS	
Contact Person	Nevena Marčeta
Organisation	NALED
City	Belgrade
Country	Republic of Serbia
Phone	+381 11 337 30 63
Email	naled@naled.rs; n.marceta@naled.rs
Organisation Website	https://naled.rs/
Contact Person Webpage	https://naled.rs/izvrsna-kancelarija