

EXCELLENCE HUBS 2023 FAQs (as of 16 October 2023)

[What shall be the content of the joint R&I strategy under HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ACCESS-07-01?](#)

There is no template or standardised approach for the R&I strategy. Some key elements are nevertheless worth mentioning. There should be an analysis of research and development needs and gaps in the chosen domain and how the consortium wants to address them in a complementary manner. The pathway to commercial exploitation and how scientific results will be translated into the economy have to be described. Investment should be derived from this strategy.

[Under topic HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ACCESS-07-01, how shall we develop the accompanying measures and is it mandatory to address all options presented in the work programme?](#)

The types of accompanying actions as presented are a kind of optional shopping list that needs to be customised to the scope of the project. Particular emphasis is paid to the development of human resources, transferable skills, brain circulation and entrepreneurship.

[Under topic HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ACCESS-07-01, which are the Eastern Partnership countries?](#)

The relevant eligible EAP countries are Armenia, Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

[Is there a maximum percentage for research costs under topic HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ACCESS-07-01? If so, what cost categories are eligible for this part?](#)

There is no fixed maximum percentage like in the Twinning call. However, the work programme requires a balanced package of up to five core actions including the research project. Consequently, an overly dominant research part would cast doubts on the credibility of a balanced approach and is not in line with the overall character of a CSA and the policy objectives of the call. In view of the expected heterogeneity of the submission, we have not fixed a percentage in the work programme and leave the applicants to justify and the evaluators to assess the research needs of each individual project.

[What does "place-based" mean in the context of topic HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ACCESS-07-01 and what geographical reference is needed?](#)

"Place-based" means that the ecosystem is operating in a specific territorial (i.e. regional or local context) and thus benefiting from geographic proximity favouring close links between actors, especially academia and business. There is no prescribed geographical reference such as a territorial unit defined by NUTS. Nevertheless, it is expected that applicants briefly describe the territorial context and place-based approach in the proposal. Border-crossing ecosystems (e.g. in EU regio context) including two or more countries are also considered place-based.

[Under topic HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ACCESS-07-01, how shall we define the research component and embed it in the overall work plan?](#)

The research component needs to be presented as a distinct work package broken down to meaningful tasks and sub-tasks in a similar manner like a traditional research and innovation project (RIA). Apart from a convincing work plan, a clear reference and link to the R&I strategy needs to be included. The work package needs to clearly demonstrate that it will strengthen the link between science and business and its results will feed into a commercialisation and investment path.

[What is the ideal number of consortium partners in the context of topic HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ACCESS-07-01?](#)

There is no prescribed maximum number of participants. Under the assumption that a typical consortium will comprise two (minimum condition) to four place-based ecosystems, we may expect that a number of 10 to 16 partners would be an appropriate consortium size. Although there is no formal limit, it is strongly recommended not to exceed the number of 25 partners due to the expected management difficulties for oversized consortia.

[Under topic HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ACCESS-07-01, is a commitment for a complementary funding from regional authorities or other sources already needed at proposal stage?](#)

The commitment of the regional authorities at proposal stage will be sufficiently demonstrated by their participation in the proposal. Financial commitments may be included in the investment plans to be elaborated during the lifetime of the project.

[What TRL levels are targeted by topic HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ACCESS-07-01? Is there a mandatory indication?](#)

The call does not prescribe a particular TRL level. According to the type of activities funded under this call we would expect that a range of TRL 3 to 7 would be appropriate for these funded actions.

[Is there a definition for business entities \(active established firms with relevant revenues\) under topic HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ACCESS-07-01?](#)

To ensure an impactful economic rationale of the ecosystem, it is instrumental that companies from the 'real economy' actively participate and the consortium is not overly dominated by start-ups and consultants. Therefore, at least one of the business entities per ecosystem needs to prove that it has been existing at least for two years before the call publication and generates a significant operational income by commercial activity (not public funding). Balance sheets or extracts from annual business reports will be accepted as evidence and should be annexed to the proposals.

[Under topic HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ACCESS-07-01, must the quadruple helix consortium be formalised by a legal entity or agreement?](#)

There is no obligation to have a dedicated legal entity that assembles all components of the quadruple helix. Nevertheless, for the sake of smooth management it is recommended to make use of existing umbrella organisations (e.g. clusters) to reduce the number of individual consortium members. A consortium agreement is mandatory according to the general conditions but no further requirements for formal agreements exist.

[Under topic HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ACCESS-07-01, what is the preferred option for the societal actors to be included in the consortium?](#)

The call text lists a number of examples for societal actors who should be selected according to their added value for the project and its R&I context. The sole condition is that such actors should be neither commercial nor part of the public administration. The added value, outreach and impact of such actors will be evaluated by the experts.

[Under topic HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ACCESS-07-01, can ecosystems that are not place based i.e. connected by geographical proximity \(e.g. from different countries\) participate?](#)

This is possible but such an ecosystem would need to be in addition to the minimum condition of having two fully fledged (quadruple helix) ecosystems in the consortium and the added value of the participation of a non placed based ecosystem needs to be clearly demonstrated.

[How is European relevance defined in the context of topic HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ACCESS-07-01?](#)

'European relevance' means that there is an added value of a joint European funding versus presumably isolated regional/national activities for the participating ecosystems. The consortium has to demonstrate that it is more than the sum of its parts (i.e. the individual ecosystems). Applicants should demonstrate the strategic benefits of a European collaboration as a whole through the envisaged collaboration.

[Under topic HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ACCESS-07-01, will SMEs be privileged over large companies?](#)

The concept of ecosystems implies an adequate mix of large and small companies that may differ according to the chosen domain and business sector. Therefore, no preference for either type of company is indicated in the call. In any case SMEs are especially encouraged to participate and the call is SME-friendly. We also welcome the participation of start-ups but not exclusively.

[Under topic HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ACCESS-07-01, to what extent can partners from non-widening countries participate and how can this be justified?](#)

The excellence hub action does not foresee advanced partners like in other widening actions. Nevertheless, it is open for participation of other countries as long as the coordinator is from a widening country and there is a clear centre of gravity in widening countries. There is no hard rule but as a broad orientation, we would see this condition fulfilled if at least 70% of the financial resources of the project are allocated to widening countries and the benefits for widening countries in line with the political objective of the programme are clearly demonstrated. This is the case if there is an integration into value-adding chains, support to internationalisation especially for SMEs from widening countries, or with the transfer of knowledge and good practice or a specialised expertise contributed from non-widening countries. In the latter case we may also foresee the inclusion of a single non widening partner (not necessarily a fully-fledged quadruple helix ecosystem) as long as the minimum condition is fulfilled.

[Under topic HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ACCESS-07-01, for complex innovation ecosystems, how will the representation of quadruple helix partners work in practice?](#)

For complex ecosystems with a large number of members and in the absence of an umbrella organisation, it is recommended that the ecosystem is represented by a limited number of core partners (at least two, one research + one established business partner) who sign the grant agreement (GA) while other members of the ecosystem are listed in the proposal including a short description of their roles but are not signing the GA. The associated partners will benefit from the knowledge generated and services offered by the project (e.g. training, study visits) and contribute with their expertise to the strategic work of the consortium. Associated partners may not claim costs from the project (art. 9.1), including direct personnel costs. The use of affiliated partners (formerly linked third parties in H2020) is also a potential option if applicable.

[Under topic HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ACCESS-07-01, is there any preferred approach for the choice of the R&I domain, e.g. regional smart specialisation vs. European policy priority?](#)

In principle there are two possible and equally valid approaches for the definition of the R&I domain:

- a) Based on regional smart specialisation strategies (RIS3): The consortium needs to identify a common denominator in the RIS3s of all place-based ecosystems involved and set up the project around this topic. The reasoning behind it needs to be explained in the proposal.
- b) Based on European policy priorities: In this case the topic selection is based on EU policy priorities notably the green and digital transition. Consortia need to explain what particular aspect of these priorities they will address including the economic benefits.

It is of course also possible that these two approaches converge in a single project.

[Under topic HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ACCESS-07-01, what kind of cost can be funded for the development of pilots and demonstrators?](#)

The procurement of major equipment, R&I infrastructure and construction cannot be funded by the projects. Nevertheless, a number of preparatory actions for the development of pilots and demonstrators can be covered. Without indicating a closed list, we consider activities such as specification and pre-development of major equipment, pre-planning cost for infrastructures and feasibility studies could be eligible for funding under this call.

[Should the common investment plan already be presented in the proposal submitted to topic HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ACCESS-07-01?](#)

At proposal level no fully-fledged investment plan is required since this should be derived from the joint R&I strategy to be elaborated during the project. Nevertheless, some key elements of the investment plan should be outlined in the proposal, notably the purpose and type of investment and the envisaged funding sources as well as the approach to ensure its sustainability and expected impact.