



**NCC-BE**

BELGIUM CYBERSECURITY  
COORDINATION CENTRE



# Applying for cybersecurity funding under the Digital Europe Programme

Guidelines



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the European Union



CENTRE FOR  
CYBERSECURITY  
BELGIUM



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# 1.

## Introduction

Are you working on a **cybersecurity project** for which you'd like to get EU funding? Whether you're applying for the first time, need a refresher, or maybe your application has been rejected – this starter kit is for you. We'll guide you step-by-step through the application process for **funding under the Digital Europe Programme**.

# 7 common mistakes to avoid

Even the best proposals can fall short if they overlook vital details. Here are some common mistakes to watch out for:

- 1. Ignoring eligibility criteria:** Check if all participants and activities meet the eligibility criteria.
- 2. Lack of detail:** Provide sufficient detail in all proposal sections, especially in the implementation plan.
- 3. Misalignment with objectives:** Ensure your project aligns with the DEP's objectives and the specific call's goals.
- 4. Poor budget planning:** Draft a realistic budget that aligns with the project's needs and objectives.
- 5. Unclear description of expected outcome and impact the project is likely to have:** Clearly describe your project's expected impact and benefits.
- 6. Late submission:** To avoid last-minute issues, submit your proposal well before the deadline.
- 7. Ignoring feedback:** If your proposal is rejected, use the feedback to improve and resubmit it in future calls.

# 2.

## First things first: what's the Digital Europe Programme?

The Digital Europe Programme (DEP) is an EU funding initiative. Its primary goal is to support Europe's digital transformation, making us more resilient and competitive globally. This includes investments in supercomputing, artificial intelligence, **cybersecurity**, digital skills, and digital technologies.

### Budget?

A total investment budget of €7.6 billion for 2021-2027, with **€1.6 billion** dedicated to cybersecurity initiatives.

### For whom?

Businesses, public administrations, and academia, with a particular focus on **small and medium-sized enterprises** (SMEs).

### How to apply?

Through the Funding & Tenders portal, where specific **call texts** and documents will guide you.

[The European Cybersecurity Competence Centre](#), along with the [Network of National Coordination Centres](#), will be key players in driving the cybersecurity goals of the [Digital Europe Programme](#) and [Horizon Europe](#). By [following](#) their initiatives you can stay updated on how they contribute to enhancing the EU's strategic autonomy in the digital space.

# 3.

## Applying for funding

The DEP supports a wide range of projects that contribute to Europe's digital transformation and has identified cybersecurity as one of its key themes – concerning everything from better reporting of cyberattacks to compliance with legislation and digital twins.

### 3.1. Your starting point: looking for a 'call'

To apply for funding, start at the [Funding and Tenders portal](#). Search for '**call documents**' that match your project. A 'call' is a formal invitation by the European Commission for **project proposals** that align with specific EU funding objectives. These objectives are outlined in a [work programme](#), published every 2-3 years by the European Commission.

In the call document, you'll find these objectives, as well as the available funding, eligibility criteria, and submission deadlines.



**Tip:** If you want to get regular updates about new calls and funding opportunities, join the [LinkedIn community](#), follow our [LinkedIn page](#) or check our [website](#)!

#### 3.1.1. Topics within a call

Within a call, there are multiple topics, each addressing a specific area of interest or challenge. Topics provide detailed guidance on the types of projects sought, including:

- Specific objectives
- Expected outcomes
- Scope and requirements
- Suitability

Topics may favour applicants with particular expertise or resources. For example, a very technical cybersecurity topic might suit organisations specialising in that field.

### 3.1.2. Types of actions within a call

Depending on your project, the 'type of action' defines the **nature** of funded activities – including their scope, output, and funding rate. Common types of actions include:

- **Simple grants:** Financial contributions with co-financing requirements.
- **Innovation Actions (IA):** Developing new products, services, or processes. Perfect for private companies and startups.
- **Research and Innovation Actions (RIA):** These focus on research and new scientific results, making them ideal for research institutions and universities.
- **Coordination and Support Actions (CSA):** Involving coordination, dissemination, networking, and policy support. Best for public bodies, non-profits, or industry associations.
- **Procurement:** Funding for purchasing goods, services, or works.

## 3.2. Who can apply?

The funding is available for entities from the EU Member States as well as other countries associated to the Programme. In general, the following entities can apply:

- ✓ Legally established entities in an EU member state.
- ✓ Legally established entities in the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), countries within the European Economic Area (EEA), such as Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein (fully associated countries).
- ✓ For specific topics, countries associated with the Digital Europe Programme or those in ongoing negotiations for an association agreement (provided the deal is in force before grant signature). For more details, consult the [list of eligible countries](#) for EU funding under Digital Europe Programme.

In DEP calls, **cross-border collaboration** is encouraged. In some calls, only consortia – not private individuals – can apply. Such a consortium must include partners from different eligible countries, and some calls will also specify certain types of organisations.

To find potential **partners**, you can use the [partner search](#) option on the Funding and Tenders Portal – or you can contact us, the NCC-BE for help (at [ncc@ccb.belgium.be](mailto:ncc@ccb.belgium.be)).

# 7 tips for drafting the perfect proposal

Choosing the right calls, topics, and types of actions is crucial and should align with your project's mission, capabilities, resources, and strategic goals. Here are our top tips to help you draft a winning proposal:

- 1. Understand the call:** Thoroughly read the call document to grasp the objectives, eligibility, and evaluation criteria.
- 2. Align with objectives:** Ensure your project aligns with the DEP's objectives and the specific goals of the call. Define your objectives clearly and include measurable KPIs.
- 3. Highlight relevance:** Show how your project will reinforce the EU's digital technology supply chain. If relevant, explain how it can overcome financial obstacles.
- 4. Show maturity:** Demonstrate the right maturity level in tools, technology, services, and partner experience. Detail how your project advances beyond current solutions.
- 5. Detail implementation:** Present a clear implementation plan linked to your objectives. Explain each work package, tasks, KPIs, milestones, and resource allocation.
- 6. Engage partners:** Collaborate with partners who have complementary skills. Provide information on team members' backgrounds and relevant experience.
- 7. Articulate impact:** Explain how your project will achieve its outcomes, strengthen competitiveness, and benefit society. Define your target audience, key messages, and dissemination strategy.

By following these tips, you can enhance the quality of your proposal and increase your chances of securing funding. Good luck!



### 3.3. What kind of projects are eligible?

To be eligible, your project must align with the DEP Cybersecurity & Trust's objectives, **promoting digital technologies across Europe**, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises.

Detailed information about the objectives and initiatives is available on the European Commission's [official website](#), which provides an overview of the programme, funding opportunities, and related documents.

Your project should also consider the results of other EU-funded projects and align with EU policy interests, such as environmental, social, security, industrial, and trade policies.

As mentioned, you can always find **more detailed information** about the requirements **in the call document**.

#### Key Points

- ✓ Contribute to the DEP Cybersecurity & Trust's objectives
- ✓ Promote digital technologies, especially for SMEs
- ✓ Consider results from other EU-funded projects
- ✓ Align with EU policy interests and priorities

### 3.4. Security requirements

When participating in a cybersecurity project call, you should **always consider security restrictions** and strategic autonomy concerns under Article 12(5) of the [Digital Europe Regulation](#). The specific requirements are in the relevant call document under sections 6 and 10.

Key points include:

- **Eligibility:** Only legal entities from EU Member States and specified eligible countries can participate (see 3.2). Entities must prove their headquarters are legally registered in an EU (or EEA) country by filling out the Ownership Control Declaration, which you can search for [here](#).



- **Special conditions:** Even if you're from an [associated country](#) or your entity is controlled from within a third country, you can still join. However, you'll need to provide guarantees about protecting the EU's and Member States' essential [security interests and classified information](#).
- **Classified information:** Certain topics may have additional security requirements, including scrutiny for EU classified information projects. These need to pass a security check to get funding and might have specific security rules detailed in a Security Aspects Letter (SAL) attached to the Grant Agreement.
- **Activity location:** Your project activities must take place in eligible countries.

### 3.5. Co-financing

The Digital Europe Programme is an EU co-funding instrument which covers eligible costs only – like personnel, equipment, and travel – up to 50%, 75%, or 100%, depending on the type of action. You'll find the specific rates for each topic in the call document.

To complement the EU funding, you'll need to **find a way to cover the rest of the costs**, also known as co-financing. This can come from various sources, including revenue earned directly from your project activities or contributions from third parties, which can be public or private entities.

Think of co-financing as an **investment in your company's growth**. It's about leveraging various financial sources to make your project a reality.

# 4.

## Checklist

Ready to submit your application? Here's a handy checklist to review before you hit 'send'. Did you check all the boxes?

- ☐ Find a call for proposals on the [Funding & Tenders Portal](#)
- ☐ Decide on a funding opportunity (Calls, Topics or Type of Action).
- ☐ Select your participants (most calls require a consortium).
- ☐ Register as a European Commission Authentication Service user ([EU Login](#)).
- ☐ Ensure all participating organisations are registered in the [Participant register](#) and have a Participant Identification Code (PIC).
- ☐ Log into the [Funding & Tenders Portal](#) and select your topic.
- ☐ Create a draft for your proposal.
- ☐ Invite all participants and complete the proposal form.
- ☐ Upload mandatory annexes and supporting documents.
- ☐ Submit your proposal.



You can update, download, or withdraw your proposal until the closure date.

# 5.

## Evaluation & Selection

After submission, you can access your saved and submitted proposals anytime from the 'My Proposal(s)' page in the [Funding & Tenders Portal](#). An evaluation committee, assisted by independent experts, will assess your application based on the following criteria:

### Relevance (5 points)

- Alignment with the objectives and activities described in the call document
- Contribution to long-term policy objectives, relevant policies, and strategies
- Synergies with activities at European and national levels
- Reinforcement and security of the EU digital technology supply chain
- Ability to overcome financial obstacles, such as lack of market finance\*

### Implementation (5 points)

- Maturity of the project
- Soundness of the implementation plan and efficient use of resources
- Capacity of the applicants (and the consortium as a whole) to carry out the proposed work

### Impact (5 points)

- Achievement of expected outcomes and deliverables as outlined in the call for proposals
- Plans to disseminate and communicate project achievements
- Strengthening of competitiveness and societal benefits
- Addressing environmental sustainability and European Green Deal goals, either directly or through awareness of environmental effects\*

\*Note: May not be applicable to all topics (see *specific topic conditions in the call document*).

Each criterion is graded out of 5 points, with a minimum of 3/5 required per criterion, for a total of 15 points.

# 6.

## FAQs

Navigating the application process under the Digital Europe Programme can be complex and we realise you may still have questions. To help you out, we answered the most common ones here.

- **How long does the evaluation process take?**

After submitting a proposal, it can take up to five months to receive your evaluation result letter.

- **Which support is available during the application process?**

You can access [guidance documents](#) on the Funding and Tenders portal, attend [information sessions](#), contact the National Contact Points (NCPs) for DEP general inquiries, or seek our assistance at the NCC-BE via [ncc@ccb.belgium.be](mailto:ncc@ccb.belgium.be).

- **If selected, when will I receive my funding?**

This depends on several factors:

- ◇ **Grant agreement signature:** Once all parties (the grant recipient and the European Commission or its relevant agency) sign, the agreement becomes legally binding.
- ◇ **Pre-financing payment:** The first payment is usually a pre-financing payment and is typically made within 30 to 60 days after signing to help kickstart the project. The amount and timing are detailed in the grant agreement.
- ◇ **Interim and final payments:** These are based on project progress. Interim payments follow specific milestones or reports, while the final payment is made after the final report and financial statements are approved.

The exact timing can vary due to administrative processes, grant complexity, and how quickly the beneficiary meets reporting requirements. For precise payment details, consult the specific grant agreement.

- **Can I resubmit a rejected application?**

Yes, you can resubmit a revised application in response to future calls, if you address the feedback provided in the rejection notice.

- **What are the reporting requirements if my project is funded?**

Funded projects typically require regular progress reports, financial statements, and a final report upon project completion. Specific requirements will be detailed in the grant agreement.

- **Are there any success stories or examples of funded projects?**

You can find case studies and examples of successful projects on the [DEP website](#) or the [EU Funding and Tenders portal](#).

Didn't see your question here? Find more answers on the [Portal FAQ](#).

# 7.

## More questions? Get in touch!

If you have any questions that haven't been addressed here, in the [online manual](#) or in the [FAQ-section](#), contact [ncc@ccb.belgium.be](mailto:ncc@ccb.belgium.be) or your regional NCP. Please note that NCC-BE can't engage in project writing, but are happy to give you advice. Regular events are organized by [the NCC-BE](#), the Belgian NCPs and the EU competent bodies.

Have a technical issue while submitting your proposal? Use the [online form](#) to contact the EU Commission IT helpdesk.



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