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ANNEX

ANNEX

to the

Commission Implementing Decision

on the financing of the Digital Europe Programme and adoption of the multiannual work programme – European Digital Innovation Hubs for 2021 - 2023

EN   EN

DIGITAL EUROPE
European Digital Innovation Hubs

Work Programme 2021-2023

INTRODUCTION

Digital technologies are profoundly changing our daily life, our way of working and doing business, the way we understand and use our natural resources and environment and the way people interact, communicate and educate themselves. The von der Leyen Commission has presented an ambitious strategy on shaping Europe's digital future on 19 February 2020. The Council conclusions of 9 June 2020 confirmed this ambition.

The COVID-19 crisis has further highlighted the critical role of digital technologies and infrastructures in our lives and demonstrated how our societies and economies rely on digital solutions. Moreover, it has accelerated the digital transition. The crisis has also confirmed how important it is for Europe not to be dependent on systems and solutions coming exclusively from other regions of the world.

The efforts needed to achieve the abovementioned goals are not limited to Research and Development. The EU must drastically improve its digital capacities. This includes the deployment of digital technologies, as well as the necessary digital skills for EU workforce. Europe must also develop key digital infrastructures, innovate and strengthen its industrial base, enhance its resilience and flexibility both in terms of technologies and supply chains.

Delivering this will require massive public and private investments and common efforts that no Member State alone could secure. In that context, the European data strategy[1] has announced a High Impact project on European data spaces, encompassing data sharing architectures and governance mechanisms, as well as the European federation of energy-efficient and trustworthy cloud infrastructures and related services.

The Digital Europe Programme will also contribute to the achievement of the digital targets, as outlined in the communication: "2030 Digital Compass: the European way for the Digital Decade"[2]. Indeed, the Digital Europe work strands will provide key support to the digital transformation of the economy in the next decade, as well as to achieve a European digital sovereignty[3] by deploying key technological capabilities. The Digital Europe Programme will also contribute to the achievement of the goals highlighted in the Commission proposal for a Regulation on a Single Market For Digital Services (the Digital Services Act - DSA)[4] and a Regulation on contestable and fair markets in the digital sector (the Digital Markets Act - DMA)[5] through actions aiming to create a safer digital space in which the fundamental rights of all users of digital services are protected and through actions that aim to establish a level playing field to foster innovation, growth, and competitiveness.

This document sets out the Work Programme for the activities related to European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIH) to be implemented in the first three years of the Digital Europe Programme. It follows extensive consultations with the Member States[6], stakeholders and the public, on drafts of the strategic orientations. It uses as a reference point the Annex 1 of the Digital Europe Programme

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[1] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1593073685620&uri=CELEX:52020DC0066

[2] https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/europes-digital-decade-digital-targets-2030_en

[3] By strengthening the EU's open strategic autonomy and resilience.

[4] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=COM:2020:825:FIN

[5] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2020%3A842%3AFIN

[6] Norway and Iceland, which have asked together with Liechtenstein for association to the programme, have participated to the Digital Europe Expert Group meetings as Observers.

Regulation[7]. The activities to further extend and support the EDIH network during the final four years of the Programme will be described in a future Work Programme.

THE DIGITAL EUROPE PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES

The Digital Europe Programme will reinforce EU critical digital capacities by focusing on the key areas of artificial intelligence (AI), cybersecurity, advanced computing, data infrastructures, data governance and processing, the deployment of these technologies and their best use for critical sectors like energy climate change and environment, manufacturing, agriculture and health. The Digital Europe Programme is strategic in supporting the digital transformation of the EU industrial ecosystems. The funding will be available for EU Member States as well as other countries associated to the programme (unless otherwise specified in the topic description, tender specifications and call for proposals). The twin transitions to a green and digital Europe remains the defining challenge of this generation. This is reflected throughout the Commission's proposals. The Digital Europe Programme will deliver on the goals set out in the European data strategy of realising the vision for a genuine single market for data. It will help deploying European human-centred AI solutions as set out in the White Paper on AI[8] as well as promote the deployment of other key digital technologies with respect for Union values[9], and from a human-centric perspective. The Digital Europe Programme will unleash the powers of digital technologies to reach Europe's common climate and environmental goals as set out in the European Green Deal, including being climate neutral by 2050, as well as strengthen the resilience of Europe's industry and increase its open strategic autonomy.

The Digital Europe Programme will actively encourage proposers to include Horizon Europe / Horizon 2020 digital innovations that are 'market mature' and/or demonstrate disruptive potential (e.g. those identified by the Joint Research Centre's (JRC) Innovation Radar[10] methodology). The programme also targets upskilling of the workforce with regard to these advanced digital technologies. It supports industry, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and public administrations in their digital transformation with a reinforced network of European Digital Innovation Hubs. The Digital Europe Programme will accelerate the recovery and drive the digital transformation of Europe.

In order to fulfil its mission, Digital Europe Programme will deploy a network of European Digital Innovation Hubs offering access to technology testing and support in their digital transformation for private and public organisations all across Europe, including government at national, regional or local level, as appropriate.

The European Digital Innovation Hubs are an important tool in EU policies, in particular the industrial and SME policies, to support companies and the public sector in the twin (green and digital) transitions. They are close to local companies, speak their language and provide a seamless service together with the Enterprise Europe Network and Startup Europe. The objective of the Digital Europe

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[7] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=consil%3APE_13_2021_INIT

[8] https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/white-paper-artificial-intelligence-european-approach-excellence-and-trust

[9] Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, OJ C 326, 26.10.2012, p. 391–407

[10] https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/innovation-radar

Programme is to create a network of "European Digital Innovation Hubs" (EDIH), covering all regions of the European Union and Associated Countries, including the EU outermost regions as recognised by Article 349 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) and in line with the DEP Regulation Art 16(4) which states that 'to address the specific constraints faced by the Union's outermost regions, specific entities may be nominated to cover the needs of such regions'.

The Digital Europe Programme is open for collaboration with third countries. Specific conditions for the association or partial association of third countries to the Programme are laid down in Article 10 of the Digital Europe Programme Regulation.

The conditions for international cooperation with third countries, international organisations and bodies established in third countries, are specified in Article 11 of the Digital Europe Regulation.

Cooperation and association agreements may be subject to adequate security, IP protection and reciprocity guarantees.

Participation to the actions is intended to be open to all eligible third countries according to the Association Agreement they have signed at the time of signature of the grant agreement, even though the text of the actions only refer to Member States.

INDICATIVE BUDGET AND IMPLEMENTATION

Digital Europe Programme is implemented by means of multiannual Work Programmes. There will be four independent Work Programmes in the first two years of implementation. This Work Programme covers activities implementing the network of European Digital Innovation Hubs (under direct management by the European Commission). The other three Work Programmes are devoted to the following intervention areas: 1) High Performance Computing (implemented under indirect management by the Euro HPC JU); 2) Data, AI, Cloud, Quantum Communication Infrastructure, advanced digital Skills and deployment activities for the best use of these technologies; 3. Cybersecurity (implemented under indirect management by the Cybersecurity Industrial, Technology and Research Competence Centre and the Network of National Coordination Centres). Synergies and complementarities of the activities in the various Work Programmes will be ensured.

The budget for all the actions covered by this Work Programme is EUR 329.3 million[11].

Actions in this Work Programme are implemented in direct management by the European Commission. They will be funded using annual instalments. The following table provides an overview.

The budget figures given in this Work Programme are indicative and subject to change.

Table 1: Breakdown of global expenditure per year, budget line and type of action

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[11] The amounts drawn from the 2022 and 2023 budget are subject to the availability of the appropriations provided for in the draft budget for 2022 and 2023 respectively after the adoption of the budget 2022 and 2023 by the budgetary authority or, if the budget is not adopted, as provided for in the system of provisional twelfths.

Year	Budgetline	Amounts to be implemented in direct management (in million EUR)		Total per budget line (in million EUR)
		Calls for proposals - grants	Calls for tender - procurement	
2021	**Specific Objective 1 (02 04 02 11)**	26.5	-	26.5
	Specific Objective 2 (02 04 03)	34.1	-	34.1
	Specific Objective 3 (02 04 01 11 02)	26.5	-	26.5
	Specific Objective 5 – Deployment (02 04 05 01)	68	4	72
2022	**Specific Objective 1 (02 04 02 11)**	-	-	-
	Specific Objective 2 (02 04 03)	-	-	-
	Specific Objective 3 (02 04 01 11 02)	-	-	-
	Specific Objective 5 – Deployment (02 04 05 01)	31.9	4.1	36
2023	**Specific Objective 1 (02 04 02 11)**	17.2	-	17.2
	Specific Objective 2 (02 04 03)	17.2	-	17.2
	Specific Objective 3 (02 04 01 11 02)	17.2	-	17.2
	Specific Objective 5 – Deployment (02 04 05 01)	82.5	-	82.5
Grand total				329.3

MULTI COUNTRY PROJECTS: CO-INVESTMENTS FROM PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR AND LINKS WITH OTHER PROGRAMMES

Most actions foreseen in the Programme require co-investments from the public and private sector. The modes of these co-investments are described in the relevant parts of the various Digital Europe Work Programmes. Several actions relate to cross-border or multi-country projects (MCP) as foreseen in the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). In addition to the RRF, several programmes at EU, national and regional level will also contribute to these projects. The table below summarises the expected contributions.

Table 2: Multi Country Projects relevant for this Work Programme

MCP relevant for this Work Programme	Actions in Digital Europe Programme	Other contributing programmes
European Digital Innovation Hubs	The establishment of the network will be supported from the Digital Europe Programme, to be matched by a similar investments from Member States	RRF, ERDF

Contents

1 Accelerating best use of technologies: European Digital Innovation Hubs

The actions included in this Work Programme focus on the creation of a network of "European Digital Innovation Hubs" (EDIH), aiming to cover all regions of the European Union and Associated Countries, including the EU's outermost regions as defined in Article 349 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).

A European Digital Innovation Hub (EDIH) is a single entity or a coordinated group of entities with complementary expertise and a not-for-profit objective to support on a large scale the digital transformation of (1) companies, especially SMEs and small mid-caps, and/or (2) public sector organisations conducting non-economic activities. EDIHs provide services such as testing before investing, training and skills development, support to find investments, networking and access to innovation ecosystems.

The selection of the EDIHs will follow a two-step process: first, an Expression of Interest (see topic 1.1) will request Member States to designate potential EDIHs through a national process, and secondly the European Commission will launch two restricted calls (see topic 1.2) for proposals in which only designated potential EDIHs are eligible to participate. This will allow those potential EDIHs who did not manage to succeed at the first instance to reapply a second time. All those entities selected after the two restricted calls will form the Initial Network of European Digital Innovation Hubs.

In case the Initial Network of European Digital Innovation Hubs is not complete yet in geographical coverage or cannot satisfy the demand for the hub's services in a given Member State, Article 16 of the Digital Programme Regulation foresees that the Commission may select additional European Innovation Hubs through an open and competitive process. Therefore a potential additional call is foreseen in 2023 (see also Section 3.2.3).

A Seal of Excellence will be awarded to those potential EDIHs that passed the threshold in each of the calls, but which cannot be funded because of lack of budget available in Digital Europe Programme. If Member States or regions decide to fund those entities, once they are in operation they will also be able to use the label "European Digital Innovation Hub" and will be full members of the network.

This network will be supported by the Digital Transformation Accelerator (see topic 1.3), which will provide services for community building, training, networking, impact assessment, communication.

The governance of the network is foreseen through the Member State group governing the AI Coordinated plan and Digitising European Industry.

The participation to grants awarded for Section 1.2. is limited to organisations that have been designated by their Member State or associated country according to the conditions set out in Section 1.1. The procurement (Section 1.3) is open to all eligible entities as established by Art. 18 of the Digital Europe Programme, in particular public sector as well as private sector organisations including SMEs and NGOs.

1.1 Expression of Interest to designate candidate European Digital Innovation Hubs

Objective

The objective is to obtain a list of candidate European Digital Innovation Hubs, proposed by Member States and Associated Countries, which will be allowed to respond to the restricted calls for the Initial Network of EDIH.

Scope

All Member States and Associated Countries are requested to designate a number of potential EDIHs geographically spread (in case they will have more than one EDIH) over the country, that respond to the demand of industry and public sector while taking into account existing assets and National priorities. They have to be selected through an open and competitive process in accordance with national procedures, administrative and institutional structures. This process can have happened in the past, but not before 1 May 2016.

Member States and Associated Countries are invited to designate a number of potential EDIH included between the minimum and maximum numbers recommended in the call document. However, they are free to designate a different number of hubs according to their specific geographical and sectoral needs. They can also designate more hubs than could be funded in order to raise the competition during the call process. The total amount of funding foreseen in the budget table for any one country is indicative for the maximum amount of co-funding foreseen in Digital Europe Programme for all EDIHs of that country during the duration of the Programme. Countries will foresee to co-fund the selected EDIHs in their territory by providing matching funding. Member States should also consider how the needs of their outermost regions will be covered by the nominated entities, in line with DEP Regulation Art. 16(6).

Several countries can jointly propose and co-fund cross-border trans-national hubs, serving neighbouring regions in different countries[12] tackling common challenges identified in the border regions and to exploit the untapped growth potential in border areas. In this case, only the share of the funding of each country involved in the cross-border trans-national will be taken into account for the total amount of funding for that country. Designated candidate EDIHs should have:
- appropriate competences related to the functions of the European Digital Innovation Hubs defined above;
- appropriate management capacity, staff and infrastructure necessary to carry out the functions defined above;
- operational and legal means to apply the administrative, contractual and financial management rules laid down at Union level;
- appropriate financial viability, corresponding to the level of Union funds they will be called upon to manage and demonstrated, where appropriate, through guarantees, issued preferably by a public authority.

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[12] Cross-border hubs target SMEs and public sector entities operating in border regions. As such, they are meant to support European cross-border cooperation between adjacent regions of different countries to promote integrated and harmonious regional development between neighbouring land and maritime border regions. See https://interreg.eu/

Given the importance of Artificial Intelligence and its wide applicability in all sectors, the European Commission expects that at least one of the hubs designated in each country will have expertise in AI. Most Member States have also signed in 2019 the Digital Declaration on smart agriculture and rural areas[13], where Digital Innovation Hubs play an important role; these hubs may be proposed as European Digital Innovation Hubs. In order to foster synergies with the space hubs as foreseen under Regulation (EU) 2021/696, space hubs may also be proposed as European Digital Innovation Hubs.

As a proof of their designation, Member States must provide a letter to all designated potential EDIHs declaring that they have been selected by the Member State to participate in the calls (see 1.2). Potential EDIHs must attach this letter to their application to the calls. This implies that the preselection process by Member States must be finalised in time for the applicants to apply to the calls.

1.2   Initial Network of European Digital Innovation Hubs

Objective

Set-up the Initial Network of European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIH) from all designated candidate entities resulting from the Expression of Interest (1.1). Upgrade these entities to provide the complete set of services of an EDIH, including the necessary infrastructure, in a specific geographical area, covering the needs of the local SMEs, small mid-caps and/or public sector organisations with respect to their digital transformation. Network these EDIHs with each other and with other projects selected in Digital Europe Programme developing capacities in High Performance Computing, Artificial Intelligence, Cybersecurity, Advanced Digital Skills and accelerating the best use of these technologies.

Scope

Each EDIH will provide services based on a specific focus/expertise, which will support the local private and public sector with their digital and green transformation. The specialisation can be strengthened over time, and should make use of existing local competencies in this area. The services will be provided on an open, transparent and non-discriminatory basis and will be targeted mainly to (1) SMEs and small-midcaps and/or (2) public sector organisations conducting non-economic activities.

Each EDIH will act as an access point to the European network of EDIHs, helping local companies and/or public actors to get support from other EDIHs in case the needed competences fall outside their competence, ensuring that every stakeholder gets the needed support wherever it is available in Europe. Reversely, each EDIH will support the companies and public actors from other regions and countries presented by other EDIHs that need their expertise.

The EDIHs will be active in networking with other hubs, sharing best practices and specialist knowledge, in bringing companies into contact with other companies of their value chain, and in seeking synergies with innovators and early adopters - including artist, designers, architects and other creatives that test solutions in novel experiments and can foster the adoption of digital technologies in working and business environments in a more human-friendly way. EDIHs will also

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[13] https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/eu-member-states-join-forces-digitalisation-european-agriculture-and-rural-areas

play a brokering role between public administrations and companies providing e-government technologies. In all the networking activities, EDIHs will be supported by the Digital Transformation Accelerator (see topic 1.3), and therefore it is compulsory that EDIHs participate actively in the relevant support activities of the Digital Transformation Accelerator, such as matchmaking, training and capacity building events.

Each EDIH will make available the relevant experimentation facilities related to its specialisation. SMEs, small mid-caps and the public sector will be able to test the technologies proposed, including where relevant their environmental impact, and the feasibility of applying these technologies to their business before further investing in it.

Furthermore, they will act as a multiplier and widely diffuse the use of all the digital capacities built up under the different specific objectives of the Digital Europe Programme on High Performance Computing, Artificial Intelligence, Cybersecurity, Advanced Digital Skills and Accelerating the best use of technologies. For this purpose, the EDIHs will participate in a "Train the trainer" programme where the specialists of the digital capacities train the EDIHs on how to use the capacities, so that the EDIHs can help their stakeholders to make use of them. It should be avoided that there is duplication of actions of the High Performance Computing competence centers,the Cybersecurity centers, the AI Testing and Experimentation Facilities and the EDIHs, and therefore working arrangements will be agreed among them, where the focus of the EDIHS will be on their role as multiplier and reaching out to all regions in Europe. The "Train the trainer" events, together with other events for the network of EDIH, will be organised by the Digital Transformation Accelerator. EDIHs should foresee active participation in those events.

EDIHs are encouraged to make use of the digital tools provided by the DTA, but are also free to use their own tools. However, interoperability with the DTA tools is a requirement, so that users of the EDIHs will have a seamless experience.

EDIHs will maintain structured long-term relationships with the relevant local actors like regional authorities, industrial clusters, SME associations, business development agencies, incubators (including European Space Agency Business Incubators, the ESA BICs), accelerators, chambers of commerce, and partners of the European Enterprise Network (EEN). Specifically, EDIHs will offer a seamless service with EEN and Startup Europe, e.g. by offering joint investor-related events, organising common trainings, workshops or info days, directing SME from EEN to EDIHs and from EDIHs to EEN as needed. It is expected that local EEN nodes that team up with a local EDIH will sign a Memorandum of Understanding to regulate their collaboration.

Finally, EDIH should become an interface for the European Commission to support the implementation of specific sectorial policies, SME policies and eGovernment policies. This will imply that EDIHs specialised in a specific sector could be consulted on policies related to their sector of competence, and could participate in specific actions, such as the New European Bauhaus initiative, where EDIHs for which it is relevant might be asked to help accelerate the take up of results and the emergence of lead markets. Another example is the "Adopt AI" programme that is currently under development as a result of the White Paper on AI[14].

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[14] https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/white-paper-artificial-intelligence-european-approach-excellence-and-trust_en

The Digital Transformation Accelerator will also have the role to report on overall Key Performance Indicators of the network, and therefore each EDIH will provide them with the necessary information.

Outcomes and deliverables

At the end of the project, a balanced network of EDIH will cover all regions in Europe, addressing the needs of the public and private sectors, including all economic sectors, offering a wide range of specialised digital transformation services.

The following indicators will be used to evaluate the performance of the hub; proposals should define their targets related to each of them:

- Number of businesses and public sector entities, which have used the European Digital Innovation Hubs' services, by user category (businesses of different sizes, public sector entities, etc.), sector, location and type of support received. Where relevant, this will include a description of which Digital Europe Programme capacities have been used.
- For access to finance: amount of additional investments successfully triggered (e.g. through venture capital, bank loan, etc.).
- Number of collaborations foreseen with other EDIHs and stakeholders outside the region at EU level, and description of jointly shared infrastructures / joint investments with other EDIH.

A set of additional impact indicators will be collected and analysed with the support of the Digital Transformation Accelerator:

- Increase in digital maturity of organizations that have used the services of the EDIH network. Digital maturity will be defined on the basis of a questionnaire developed by the Joint Research Centre assessing the categories digital strategy and readiness, intelligence and automation, data and connectedness, green and human-centric digitalisation[15]. The green digitalisation category will focus on the use of digital technologies to improve environmental sustainability and the inclusion of circularity in value chains.

- Market maturity and market creation potential of innovations, as defined in the JRC's Innovation Radar methodology[16].

Cross-border trans-national hubs are possible; in this case, each Member State involved will provide the co-financing for participants legally established in their country. Grants will make use of multi-annual instalments.

Only entities that are designated by their Member State or Associated countries may apply to this call. As a proof of their designation they need to attach the letter of designation they received to their proposal.

Type of action	Simple grant (50% co-funding)
Indicative budget	EUR 321.2 million
Indicative time of call opening	First and second call[17]

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[15] How to measure EDIH impact? Overview of JRC Digital Maturity Assessment Framework, 2021, JRC126234.

16 https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/innovation-radar

Indicative duration of the action	3 years
Implementation	European Commission

1.3 Digital transformation accelerator

Objective

The Digital Transformation Accelerator (DTA) will support the effectiveness and efficiency of the network of European Digital Innovation Hubs, with the core objective to accelerate the digital transformation of the European economy.

Scope

The DTA will provide the following services to the network of EDIHs.

- Community building and training:
  - o Guidance for hubs: this may include guidance to set up new hubs, re-usable support tools (templates, webinars, guidelines, good practices, reusable capacities, etc.), carefully selected good practice cases, twinning programmes, etc.
  - o Provisioning of training services and material (e.g. on-line videos / tutorials, physical and on-line workshops) covering the needs of the EDIH. Technological and financial aspects should be covered, e.g. by providing training about InvestEU, Digital Europe Programme, Horizon Europe and other relevant programmes.
  - o Organisation of appropriate on-line and physical events to support matchmaking where needs for specific competences are advertised and matching hubs may be found. Such matchmaking should be supported by a digital matchmaking marketplace. Startup Europe and the Innovation Radar may be used to identify startups offering digital capacities and transformation services to SMEs.
  - o Community building events dedicated to groups of EDIHs sharing similar interests (e.g. technology, geographical area, industry sector), and engaging with DIHs or similar organisations that are not part of the European DIH network. A specific target will be setting up links between EDIHs and DIHs focused on agriculture, health or public administration.

- Train the trainer: developing ways to transfer the knowledge on how to access the Digital Capacities (built up under the different Specific Objectives of the Digital Europe Programme) to the EDIHs and vice versa, for instance by organising regular training workshops and providing appropriate training material, and information on the available Digital Capacities. This will allow EDIHs to further diffuse advanced knowledge to their own stakeholders, and ensure wide use of the digital capacities developed with the support of Digital Europe Programme.

- Connection to relevant initiatives: providing to interested EDIH the opportunity to engage with local, regional, national and European policymakers, Startup Europe, the Enterprise

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[17] Subject to the outcome of these two calls, an additional call to complete the network could be necessary. This call would not be limited to the deignated hubs by the Member states. See also Section 3.2.3.

Europe Network, the European Digital Government EcoSystem, the Joinup Interoperability Hub, the European Innovation Partnership Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability (EIP-AGRI), CASSINI network, Open Innovation Test Beds, Hubs for Circularity, Horizon Europe projects related to the Adaptation and Smart Cities mission and any other relevant initiative. The DTA will help hubs to get in touch with the right organisations and people, including e.g. relevant Horizon Europe projects, and will provide information and support as needed, also to national and regional policy makers. They will also be the first contact point for international collaboration between the EDIHs and relevant organisations from third countries, and can e.g. advise on study visits.

- Impact assessment and roadmapping: these services cover the collection and analysis of the key performance indicators (KPI) defined for the EDIH. The DTA will help EDIHs in the yearly collection of the relevant data, including by providing the needed IT tools and support. As a result of the impact assessment, the DTA will provide a yearly summary report identifying the needed improvements in the EDIH network, defining a roadmap for the future actions.

- Online presence, external communication, tools and support: the DTA will be the first online point of contact for all the information related to the EDIHs. It will provide a curated multilingual web portal with links to all the relevant online resources, continuously updated, including e.g. success stories of digital transformation; training courses supported by advanced digital skills pillar of Digital Europe Programme. The DTA will take care of external communications and media presence for the network of EDIH and will support individual EDIH in communication activities when needed. The DTA will manage the interactive catalogue of European Digital Innovation Hubs[18], and will make available the appropriate IT tools to support online activities related to the services provided. This may include, e.g.: collaboration and teleconferencing tools, secure storage, online training tools, etc. In general, the DTA will provide the IT support needed for common activities involving several EDIH and relevant stakeholders.

Outcomes and deliverables

As a result of this action, the network of European Digital Innovation Hubs will efficiently deliver digital transformation services to the European SME and to the public sector. The following specific impacts are expected:

- An active network of EDIHs where all stakeholders obtain the best possible support and new European value chains are created;

- A set of training and networking events, both on-line and physical, improving the capacity of each EDIH and ability to widely diffuse the digital capacities build up through the Digital Europe Programme;

- Broad availability of collaboration tools for common activities;

- Availability of high quality KPIs for the EDIH network;

- A fully functional interactive catalogue of EDIH;

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[18] Based on JRC EDIH catalogue: https://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/digital-innovation-hubs-tool

- A recognizable online presence, including easy availability and accessibility of public information relevant for the EDIH network and related European initiatives.

Type of action	Procurement
Indicative budget	EUR 4 million
Indicative time of tender publication	Q4 2021
Indicative duration of the action	3 years
Implementation	European Commission

2 Programme Support Actions

Programme support actions for this Work Programme are limited to the external assistance needed for the evaluation of the proposals and monitoring of the projects, and to studies improving European, national and regional digitalisation strategies for SMEs.

The use of appointed independent experts need an estimated budget of EUR 3.6 million. For studies, indicatively EUR 0.5 million is foreseen.

3 Implementation

This Work Programme will be implemented in direct management through procurement and grants.

The different nature and specificities of the actions indicated in the previous chapters require distinctive implementation measures. Each of these will therefore be achieved through various implementation modes as follow.

Proposers are strongly encouraged to follow green public procurement principles and take account of life cycle costs[19].

3.1 Procurement

Procurement actions will be carried out in compliance with the applicable EU public procurement rules. The procedures will be implemented either through direct calls for tenders or by using existing framework contracts. IT development and procurement activities will be carried out in compliance with European Commission's applicable IT governance rules.

3.2 Grants – Calls for proposals

3.2.1 Evaluation process

The evaluation of proposals will be based on the principles of transparency and equal treatment. It will be carried out by the Commission services with the assistance of independent experts.

Admissibility conditions

Proposals must be submitted before the call deadline and only through the means specified in the call for proposals. The call deadline is a deadline for receipt of proposals.

Proposals must be complete and contain all parts and mandatory annexes and supporting documents specified in the call for proposals. Incomplete proposals may be considered as inadmissible.

Eligibility criteria

Proposals will be eligible if they are submitted by entities and/or consortiums compliant with the requirements set out in this Work Programme and the relevant call for proposals. Only proposals meeting the requirements of the eligibility criteria in the call for proposals will be evaluated further.

Exclusion criteria

Applicants which are subject to EU administrative sanctions (i.e. exclusion or financial penalty decision)[20] might be excluded from participation. Specific exclusion criteria will be listed in the call for proposals.

Financial and operational capacity

Each individual applicant must have stable and sufficient resources as well as the know-how and qualification to successfully implement the projects and contribute their share. Organisations

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[19] http://ec.europa.eu/environment/gpp/index_en.htm

[20] See Article 136 of EU Financial Regulation 2018/1046.

participating in several projects must have sufficient capacity to implement all these projects. Applicants must demonstrate their financial and operational capacity to carry out the proposed action.

Award criteria

The three sets of criteria are listed in Annex 1 of this Work Programme. Each of the eligible proposals will be evaluated against the award criteria. Proposals responding to a specific topic as defined in the previous chapters of this Work Programme will be evaluated both individually and comparatively. The comparative assessment of proposals will cover all proposals responding to the same topic.

Proposals that achieve a score greater than or equal to the threshold will be ranked within the objective. These rankings will determine the order of priority for funding. Following evaluation of award criteria, the Commission establishes a Selection Decision taking into account the scores and ranking of the proposals, the programme priorities and the available budget.

The coordinators of all submitted proposals will be informed in writing about the outcome of the evaluation for their proposal(s).

3.2.2 Selection of independent experts for evaluation and reviews

The Commission will select independent experts to assist with the evaluation of proposals and with the review of project results as well as for other purposes where specific expertise might be required for implementation of the Programme. Experts are invited to apply by registering their candidature using the on line tool provided by the Commission. Experts will be selected on the basis of their ability to perform the tasks assigned to them, taking into account the thematic requirements of the topic, and with consideration of geographical and gender balanceas well as the requirement to prevent and manage (potential) conflicts of interest.

3.2.3 Indicative implementation calendar

The indicative calendar for the implementation of the Digital Europe Programme calls for proposals in 2021 and 2022 is shown in the table below.

The calls for proposals in this Work Programme will be covered in two main calls. A potential additional call could be launched in 2023 in case the outcomes of the first two calls make it necessary to complete the network of European Digital Innovation Hubs with additional hubs, as foreseen in the Digital Europe Programme Regulation, Article 16. The table below does not prevent the opening of additional calls if needed.

More information about these calls will be available on: https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/home. The duration of the grants will be the same for proposals selected in any of the calls (i.e. three years).

Table 3: Call timeline for topics in this Work Programme

Milestones	First call	Second call

Call Opening[21]	Q4 - 2021	Q3 - 2022
Deadline for submission[22]	Q1 - 2022	Q4 - 2022
Evaluation	Q2 - 2022	Q1 - 2023
Information to applicants on the outcome of the call	Q3 - 2022	Q2 - 2023
Signature of contracts	Q4 - 2022	Q3 - 2023

21 The Director-General responsible for the call may delay the publication and opening of the call by up to three months.

22 The Director-General responsible for the call may delay this deadline by up to three months.

4 Annexes

4.1 Annex 1 – Award criteria for the calls for proposals

Proposals are evaluated and scored against award criteria set out for each topic in the call document. The general award criteria for the Digital Europe calls are as follows:

1. Relevance:

- Alignment with the objectives and activities as described in the call for proposals
- Contribution to long-term policy objectives, relevant policies and strategies, and synergies with activities at European and national level
- Extent to which the project would reinforce and secure the digital technology supply chain in the EU*
- Extent to which the project can overcome financial obstacles such as the lack of market finance*

* This might not be applicable to all topics. See specific topic conditions in the call for proposals.

2. Implementation

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

3. Impact

- Extent to which the project will achieve the expected outcomes and deliverables referred to in the call for proposals and, when relevant, the plans to disseminate and communicate project achievements
- Extent to which the project will strengthen competitiveness and bring important benefits for society
- Extent to which the project addresses environmental sustainability and the European Green Deal goals, in terms of direct effects and/or in awareness of environmental effects*

*This might not be applicable to all topics and in only exceptional and duly justify reasons may not be evaluated. See specific topic conditions in the call for proposals.

4.2 Annex 2 – State aid

The support provided by Member States for EDIHs is subject to State aid control. Where State aid is provided for a full pass on to the EDIHs' users, it does not need to be notified to the Commission when it is granted to EDIHs in line with the General block exemption Regulation (GBER) Regulation (for example under Article 28 GBER: Aid for Innovation Advisory Services, Article 25 of the GBER: support for RDI projects) or the de minimis[23] Regulation. In this regard, it is understood that EDIHs will fully pass on all the State aid to their users and any State aid left at the level of EDIHs will have to be recovered[24] or MSs must make sure that any aid left at the level of the EDIH fulfils the compatibility conditions set out in Article 27 (in conjunction with Article 8) of the GBER on support for innovation clusters.

Under Article 28 of the GBER, SME users accessing EDIHs services can benefit from State aid passed on by the EDIHs in the form of charges below market prices. In particular, Article 28 (4) the GBER states "*In the particular case of aid for innovation advisory and support services the aid intensity can be increased up to 100% of the eligible costs provided that the total amount of aid for innovation advisory and support services does not exceed EUR 200.000 per undertaking within any three year period.*" On this basis, any SME would be allowed to use the EDIH services/functions for free or at reduced price up to a maximum value/aid element of EUR 200.000. Therefore, in their proposal, each EDIH should present a price list, based on market prices if these exist, and display the available reductions it plans to offer to SMEs. If market prices do not exist, then the prices should be based on the full costs incurred by the EDIH in providing these services and a reasonable profit. The price list would apply to all stakeholders but SMEs and public sector could receive the services for free or at reduced costs; for SMEs this is possible as long as the limit of EUR 200.000 per three year period is respected. With a view to the threshold set out in Article 28 of the GBER per user, EDIHs should also be obliged to monitor the reductions granted to any SMEs to make sure that the threshold of EUR 200.000 is not exceeded, and should likewise inform the SMEs about the amount of reductions they benefitted from, on an annual basis.

Furthermore, Article 25 of the GBER may be used to grant EDIHs users – both large undertakings and SMEs – access below market prices, if the users need to access EDIHs services in the context of a research and development project. The proportion of the market price paid by such users, which may also be supported by State aid, depends on the category of the research activity concerned and whether the user is a SME or a large enterprise (see Article 25 of the GBER Regulation for aid intensities applicable to support for RDI activities). In order to ensure that all State aid granted initially to EDIHs is fully passed on to the users, detailed accounting records need to be maintained by EDIHs to account for the State aid it has received to be transferred to the users.

The EDIHs need to also ensure (in their accounting records) that any amounts of aid that are provided to the EDIHs to benefit their own activities (for example aid granted under Article 27 of the

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[23] COMMISSION REGULATION (EU) No 1407/2013

[24] The Member States should put in place a claw-back mechanism in order to ensure that any amount of aid not passed on to the final users by the end of contractual period will be recovered, so as to guarantee that the EDIHs do not have any advantage. The recovery of funds will be calculated based on the amount of aid given to EDIHs minus the discounts given to the users. In cases where the entire amount of aid is not passed on to the final users, the MS must ensure that the amount to be recovered shall bear interest throughout the period running from the date on which they were put at the disposal of the EDIHs until the actual recovery. This interest should be established in accordance with the provisions of the Communication on the revision of the method for setting the reference and discount rates and with the provisions of Articles 9 to 11 of the Implementing Regulation.

GBER) are clearly separated from the outset, from the amounts which are to be fully passed on to the final users in the form of reduced access prices[25].

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[25] for the purpose of calculating the value of the aid passed on to the final users, the value of the discounts granted to the final users will be discounted to their value at the date at which the public funds were put at the disposal of the relevant EDIHs, in accordance with the dispositions of the Communication on the revision of the method for setting the reference and discount rates and with the dispositions of Articles 9 to 11 of Commission Regulation (EC) No 794/20046(hereafter "the Implementing Regulation"). The total amount of aid passed on to the final users will be calculated as the discounted value of the rebates given and this amount will be compared with the value of the public funds put at the disposition of the EDIHs. This is to ensure that the EDIHs do not benefit from having access to the funds until it is passed on to the final users.