



FUNDING SCHEME

«RESTART 2016-2020» Programmes for Research, Technological Development and Innovation

PROGRAMME

«DEVELOPMENT OF INTERNATIONALLY COMPETITIVE INNOVATIVE PRODUCTS AND SERVICES BY STARTUPS»

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

SEED/0525



Co-funded by
the European Union



RESEARCH
& INNOVATION
FOUNDATION



INTRODUCTION

The Research and Innovation Foundation (RIF) announces the Call for Proposals for the **«Development of Internationally Competitive Innovative Products and Services by STARTUPS (SEED)»** Programme within the framework of the **«RESTART 2016-2020» Programmes for the period May 2022-June 2025** and invites potential beneficiaries to submit relevant Project Proposals (Proposals).

The present Call will be co-financed by the Republic of Cyprus and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), in the frame of the Operational Programme «ΘΑΛΕΙΑ» 2021-2027 under Priority 1: «Competitive, Smart and Digital Economy» and the Specific Objective (1i): «Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies».

GENERAL CALL INFORMATION

Pillar	II. SUSTAINABLE RTDI SYSTEM
Programme	Development of Internationally Competitive Innovative Products and Services by Startups
Call Identifier	SEED/0525
Funding Source	EU Recovery and Resilience Facility
Call Budget	3.000.000 Euro
Maximum Funding Per Project	500.000 Euro
Publication Date	28 May 2025
Καταληκτική Ημερομηνία	12 September 2025, time 13.00

The English version of the Call, even though an official translation endorsed by the Research and Innovation Foundation, is provided for information purposes only. Only the Greek version of the Call is legally binding and shall prevail in case of any divergence in interpretation.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of the “Development of Internationally Competitive Innovative Products and Services by STARTUPS (SEED)” Programme aims to support the rapid development of dynamic and innovative STARTUPS which intend to develop internationally competitive products or services, as well as to mobilize private investment funds for this purpose.



DESCRIPTION

The Programme aims to support innovative STARTUPS which, based on their business plan, aim to attract investment funds and are seeking rapid growth at an international level. The Companies have already been active for a short period of time, they may have carried out a small scale and on a test basis activity towards commercialization, but their product or service has not yet penetrated the market.

The Programme supports every activity that will allow the rapid development of the enterprise and the innovative idea, the attraction of investment and the successful global market penetration of the product / service.

In the cases where the new product or service is based on new technology, it is expected that the technology falls within a high technological readiness level (at least TRL - Technology Readiness Levels ≥ 6 , according to the relevant definitions adopted by the EUA¹), having already been validated in laboratory and relevant environment and is at least being demonstrate at relevant environment. This will also apply to non-technological innovations, accordingly.

BENEFICIARIES

Enterprises, Research Organisations, Other Private Sector Organisations

SPECIFIC PARTICIPATION RESTRICTIONS AND CONDITIONS

The Host Organisation (HO) must be a Start-Up Enterprise.

The Host Organisation must meet the criteria of the definition of a Start-Up enterprise, as defined in the provisions of Article 22 of Regulation (EC) 651/2014 on State Aid and referred to in Chap. 1.2 – Organisation Types of Section III of the RESTART Programmes 2016-2020.

Research Organisations, Enterprises, or Other Organisations may participate as Partner Organisations.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

For the Host Organisation, Start-ups Activities which indicatively can be the following:

- Development / completion of prototypes, demonstration, pilot operation, test and validation of new or improved innovative products / services.

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The Technology Readiness Levels adopted by the EU are the following:

- TRL 1 - basic principles observed,
- TRL 2 - technology concept formulated,
- TRL 3 - experimental proof of concept,
- TRL 4 - technology validated in lab,
- TRL 5 - technology validated in relevant environment,
- TRL 6 - technology demonstrated in relevant environment,
- TRL 7 - system prototype demonstration in operational environment,
- TRL 8 - system complete and qualified,
- TRL 9 - actual system proven in operational environment (competitive manufacturing in the case of key enabling technologies).



- Scientific / technical Feasibility Study for the innovative business idea, including the investigation of its commercial potential, and validation of the business model.
- Participation of the company in trade fairs / exhibitions for the promotion of the product / service.
- Acquisition, validation and protection of patents / industrial designs and other intangible assets.
- Hire of highly qualified personnel.
- Innovation advisory services, assistance and training in the fields of:
 - (a) Knowledge transfer,
 - (b) Acquisition, protection and exploitation of intangible assets, and
 - (c) Use of standards and regulations embedding them.
- Innovation support services for:
 - (a) Testing and certification,
 - (b) Access to research infrastructures, libraries and databases,
 - (c) Market Research, and
 - (d) Quality Labeling.
- Promotional (Marketing / branding) activities of the company for the products / services such as publications, advertisements, audio-visual material, graphics, travelling abroad for promotional purposes and/or for attracting investors.
- Activities to enhance investment readiness and attract private equity.

In parallel with the above activities of the funded projects, it is recommended that beneficiaries proceed to obtain, from specialised consultants, Mentoring-Coaching services, which may concern the formulation of their business strategy, the improvement of their investment readiness, the facilitation of access to financial capital, etc.

Only Experimental Development activities are allowed for Partner Organisations. The experimental development activities should relate to technology readiness level (TRL ≥ 6).

Please note that dissemination activities are only eligible for organisations under Category A (Research Organisations) and C2 (Other Public and Public Sector Organisations).

PROJECT DURATION

12 - 24 Months

BUDGET

€ 3.000.000

MAXIMUM FUNDING PER PROJECT

Up to € 500.000

The aid intensity of the Host Organisation amounts up to 85%.



It is noted that, Aid Intensity for Partner Organisations is calculated according to State Aid Regulations with the provisions of Chapter 3.2 of the RESTART 2016-2020 Programmes for the period May2022-June 2025.

ELIGIBLE COSTS

In the frame of the present Call, the following costs are eligible for the Host Organisation:

- Personnel Cost.
- Costs for Instruments and Equipment (full cost).
- Costs for External Services (up to 50% of total project budget).
- Costs for Travelling Abroad.
- Consumables.
- Other specific costs (related to the project activities but cannot be included in the above cost categories).
- Overheads (up to 20% of the direct costs).

For the purpose of auditing and approving the eligible costs, for the above startup's expenses, the provisions of Charter 5.4 of the present Work Programme apply.

For Experimental Research activities of the Partner Organisations, the following costs are eligible:

- Personnel Cost.
- Costs for Instruments and Equipment (depreciation).
- Costs for External Services.
- Costs for Travelling Abroad.
- Consumables.
- Other specific costs.
- Overheads.

The total costs of the Partner Organizations should not exceed 30% of the total project budget.

SERVICES OF THE CENTRAL KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER OFFICE (KTO)

Beneficiaries of this Programme will automatically become Beneficiaries of the services and tools for knowledge transfer offered by RIF, in the framework of the Central Knowledge Transfer Office (KTO) and the Innovation Factory.

Aiming at enhancing the projects' potential for exploitation of research results, all Project Consortia funded under the present Call are **obliged** to contact the Central Knowledge Transfer Office (KTO), for the preparation of a specialised Service Delivery Plan. It is noted that, the **acceptance of the Service Delivery Plan** by the Project Consortia and the utilization of the central KTO services **will be optional**.



RESTART 2016-2020 WORK PROGRAMME

All general rules and procedures for the participation of organisations and individuals, the eligible activities and costs, as well as the specific information regarding the Programmes RESTART 2016-2020 **are included in the RESTART 2016-2020 Work Programme for the period May 2022 - June 2025**, which is the main reference document and an important information source for interested parties and can be found on the Research and Innovation Foundation's IRIS (Innovation Research Information System) Portal (<https://iris.research.org.cy/#/documentlibrary>).

SPECIFIC CONDITIONS

Within the framework of the present Call the following specific conditions also apply:

- ⬡ Start-ups that have been funded by the Foundation as Host Organisation under previous Calls for Proposals of the SEED, INNOVATE and DISRUPT Programmes are not eligible for funding as Host Organisation.
- ⬡ A company may submit only one proposal as Host Organisation.
- ⬡ An Enterprise cannot be Host Organisation of a SEED Project and in one of the following Programmes at the same time: INNOVATE and DISRUPT.
- ⬡ Organisations that will be invited to the second stage of the evaluation and are already Host Organisation beneficiaries of projects funded under the Innovation Programmes (PRE-SEED , BOOST, and Fast Track Innovation) will have to document with evidence of the simultaneous implementation of the projects together with the presentation for the second phase to ensure their ability to implement them simultaneously and to avoid double funding.
- ⬡ At least one person from the Host Organisation participating in the project team, before the signing of the Project Contract, must attend two mandatory training seminars organised by the Foundation on the subjects of (i) Regulations and financial management of projects, and (ii) Project Implementation and Monitoring. In case of non-compliance, within a specified period of time, the Contract preparation process may be terminated.
- ⬡ During the implementation of the project and until the submission of the Interim Project Progress Report, at least one person from the Host Organisation participating in the project team must attend two mandatory training seminars organised by the Foundation on the topics of (i) New Product Development, and (ii) Sales. The certificates of attendance of the seminars will be deliverables that should be submitted with the Interim Project Progress Report.
- ⬡ Funded projects will have to create an active website presenting the activities of the enterprise, which will be a mandatory deliverable of the project.
- ⬡ The following Costs are not eligible:
 - (a) Acquisition, validation and protection of patents / industrial designs and other intangible assets,



- (b) Consulting Services for technology transfer activities, and
- (c) Consulting Services for the preparation of Feasibility Study / Business Plan.
- For Cost Category «Personnel Cost», all organisations which have not previously participated in the RESTART 2016-2020 Programmes, are obliged to make use of the Simplified Cost Option « Standard Scales of Unit Costs» for the calculation of personnel costs.
- For Cost Category «Instruments and Equipment», purchase cost for instruments and specialised equipment, and computers and software (including standard office computer and software), is eligible. The purchase of used equipment is allowed, however beneficiaries are advised to purchase brand new equipment. Purchase of basic office equipment, furniture etc, is not eligible. Equipment should be purchased after the Proposal Submission date.
- For Cost Category «External Services» the acquisition of consulting and other services for the following indicative activities, is eligible:
 - Market Research,
 - Technical consulting services and training relating to the prototype development (incl. Testing and certification, quality labelling, access to research infrastructures, libraries and databases),
 - Innovation advisory services, assistance and training in the fields relating to the use of standards and regulations embedding them,
 - Purchase of patents, as well as licensing patent rights from external sources,
 - Logo Design,
 - Accounting services related to payroll and tax issues, bookkeeping and office automation (costs for auditing are excluded - covered by the Cost Category «Overheads»), or
 - Legal services in issues related to registration of business name / logo, shareholders capital structure (incl. employees' stock ownership plan, shareholders agreements etc), mergers and acquisitions contracts, bank transactions, data protection and privacy, employment conditions.
- The Host Organisation is obliged to submit a Report on the impact of the results of the project, including the financial data of the company, at least three times in a period of five (5) years from the end of the project - at one (1) year, at three (3) years and at five (5) years after the completion of its implementation.
- In case it is found that the Proposal (or a similar proposal with minor deviations regarding the content and / or participants) has been submitted under any other Programme or Call of the RESTART 2016-2020 Programmes, and this has not been stated by the Project Coordinator at the time of submission of the Proposal (In Part-A of the Question "Has this Proposal (or a similar one with minor deviations regarding the content and / or participants) been submitted under any other Programme of the RESTART 2016 - 2020 Programmes? "), the Foundation reserves the right to reject the



proposal at the preliminary check and/or to consider imposing sanctions on the Host Organisation and/or the Project Coordinator.

- All Private Law Organizations should submit to Competent National Registries updated data regarding their ultimate beneficial owners as per «The prevention and suppression of money laundering and terrorist financing Law of 2007 (188(I)/2007)». RIF reserves the right to carry out checks in the competent Registers and to request an official proof for the registration. Furthermore, during contract preparation, all private law organisations are obliged to submit the Declaration of Beneficial Owners accompanied by the official proof of registration. In addition, all Private Law Organisations applying for funding exceeding €150.000 must also submit in the Declaration of Beneficiaries the details of their actual beneficiaries (Name, Identity Card/Passport Number and Date of Birth).
- Funded Projects should comply with the «Do No Significant Harm» principle, according to which they must not include or support activities that could cause significant harm to any of the six environmental objectives, as per Article 17 of Regulation (EU) No 2020/852, on the establishment of a framework to facilitate sustainable investment. as described in Chapter 8 - Broader Legal Framework, of Section III of the RESTART 2016-2020 Programmes for the period May 2022-June 2025. In line with the above, activities that fall under the ineligible activities as described in the above Chapter of the RESTART are excluded under this Call.

SUBMISSION

Proposals are submitted through the Research and Innovation Foundation's **IRIS Portal** (<https://iris.research.org.cy>).

The Project Coordinator as well as all the Cyprus-based organisations that will form the Consortium of the proposal should register in advance on the IRIS Portal.

Potential applicants are advised to use the «**Guide for Applicants**», which contains guidelines and clarifications regarding the Submission procedure and the «**IRIS Portal User Manual**» which can be found on the IRIS Portal (<https://iris.research.org.cy/#/documentlibrary>).

The Research and Innovation Foundation encourages in all its Calls for Proposals:

- *the participation of women as Project Coordinators, and*
- *the gender-balanced formation of projects.*

The Project Proposal consists of the following parts:

1. Part A – General Information & Budget (electronic form (fields) to be completed online through the IRIS Portal).
2. Part B – Technical Annex - **Mandatory Submission** (document to be uploaded as an Annex on the IRIS Portal in PDF format). **Note:** *The PART B form provided for this Call for Proposals should be submitted **without any modification**. The template form is*



posted on the IRIS Portal, under the announcement of the relevant Call for Proposals (Call Documents).

3. ANNEX I – Curricula Vitae – **Mandatory Submission** at least Coordinator's CV (document to be uploaded as an Annex on the IRIS Portal in PDF format). *It is recommended that, CVs of all project team members are created according to the EUROPASS format and do not exceed 5 pages per person.*

Please note that if the requested documents are not submitted at the proposal submission stage, the proposal will not be submitted for scientific evaluation.

SELECTION

Evaluation Procedure

Proposals are evaluated in two stages:

For the Stage A of the Evaluation, a Preliminary Check and a Remote Evaluation procedure by two (2) experts, which: (a) are specialists in the proposal topic, and/or (b) have good knowledge of the business environment in the proposal field, will be followed, as specified in the RESTART 2016-2020 Work Programme for the period May 2022-June 2025. It is clarified that, in case where all requested documents are not duly submitted at the Proposal submission, then the Proposal will not be forwarded for scientific evaluation.

Proposals which secure an Evaluation Score of at least 12.00/15.00 are eligible to qualify to Stage B of the Evaluation. More specifically, the following qualify to Stage B:

- (i) the first five (5) ranked Proposals according to their Final Evaluation Score, starting with the highest scoring proposal (in descending order) with Women Project Coordinators, and
- (ii) the rest proposals ranked according to their Final Evaluation Score, starting with the highest scoring proposal (in descending order),

until the aggregated requested funding of the Proposals equals to the double of the available Call budget, and provided that the Proposals are deemed eligible for qualifying to Stage B.

The number of proposals that qualify to Stage B of the Evaluation may be increased in the following occasions: (i) Eligible proposals with the same score which are ranked at the bottom of the ranking list. In this case the proposals will proceed to Stage B, and (ii) Re-evaluation of proposals, for which a redress was submitted and approved regarding the result of the Evaluation in Stage B. In this case, re-evaluated proposals that receive the same or higher score than the last proposal on the ranking list, will qualify to Stage B. This condition applies both for the Proposals in total and specifically for the Proposals with Women Project Coordinators.

The evaluation of Proposals in Stage B is carried out by an Independent Evaluation Committee, consisted by experts with business background selected from RIF's Evaluators Database. In the frame of Stage B of the Evaluation, a member/members of the project Team present the Project, in person, to the members of the Committee, who will have the opportunity to ask for clarifications and discuss the content of the Proposal between them and with the representatives of the project Team during the meeting. The participation of representatives



from the Partner Organizations in the meetings with the Committee is allowed if deemed necessary by the applicants.

It is noted that project teams participating in Stage B should include in their presentation information on the protection and safeguarding of intellectual property rights to ensure “freedom to operate” (including ownership of intellectual property rights, any pending patent applications, as well as issues related to the exploitation of licenses).

The final decision regarding the selection of a proposal for funding by the RIF, is at the discretion of the Committee. After the completion of the procedure, the relevant Evaluation Report will be communicated to the Project Coordinator, stating the rationale behind the Committee’s decision. The Committee’s decision is final and cannot be appealed against.

Before scoring each Proposal according to the evaluation criteria, the evaluators will check:

- a) the compatibility of the proposal with the objectives of the Programme and the Call,
- (b) the compatibility of the proposed activities with the activities permitted by the Programme/Call and
- (c) the proposal's compliance with the «Do No Significant Harm» Principle.

The Evaluator will not proceed with the scientific evaluation of the 3 criteria should a Proposal fail the compatibility assessment, in any of the above compatibility criteria.

Evaluation Criteria

1. Excellence – Weight 30%

○ Quality of Project Objectives.

The project proposal refers to the adoption of a business idea with high degree of novelty and prospects of rapid growth, from a start-up enterprise aiming to develop and promote competitive innovative products or services with a potential for penetration into the international market. Particularly desirable are high-risk / high-return ideas with a view to entering the international market as soon as possible.

○ Degree of Innovation and Originality of the Idea in relation to the existing knowledge (state-of- the-art) at international level.

Evaluation of the innovation is based on existing knowledge, practice and technology at international level (state-of-the-art). It is evaluated whether the idea refers to a product / service with a high degree of novelty, significantly different in comparison with existing or competing solutions and international practice and is based on factors such as the quality / functionality of the product / service, the cost, the degree of ease of use, etc. Furthermore, the degree of innovation with regards to issues related to tackling climate change, the environment, gender dimension and any other social aspects are considered. Disruptive and breakthrough high-risk / high-return innovative ideas, with the potential to bring significant and transformational change in the market and the needs of end-users, are particularly sought after.



Emphasis should be placed on the clear identification of the strengths and weaknesses of the product / service as well as opportunities and threats for successful introduction to the existing market or the successful creation of a new market.

○ Soundness, credibility and feasibility of the proposed idea.

The soundness, credibility and feasibility of the proposed idea for the development of new products or services are evaluated. Emphasis is placed on the existence of a realistic description of the current stage of development of the idea and of the maturity of the technology (where applicable), in relation to the expectations of the Call. Furthermore, the existence of a clear and realistic description of the planned actions for the transfer of the innovation to the market is evaluated. The following are also evaluated:

- The degree of understanding of both the risks and the opportunities related to the exploitation of the innovation from both technical and commercial points of view.
- The documentation of the technological and financial sustainability of the innovation.
- Whether the objectives of the proposed project, as well as the proposed approach and activities are consistent with the expected benefit of the innovation. Respectively, in case of success the investment may result in a high reward.
- The definition of an appropriate form of the results as well as the success criteria.

During the evaluation it is taken into account that the high degree of novelty of an idea comes with a high chance of failure of the business proposal. Respectively, in case of success the investment may result in a high reward.

2. Added Value and Benefit – Weight 35%

○ Scientific and/or technological and/or social and/or economic impact and measures to maximize it.

The economic, social and other impact that will emerge through the implementation of the proposed project is evaluated, especially in relation to the following:

- The development of a viable and profitable business with rapid growth rates (and business scalability) addressing the international market.
- The company's potential to attract private investment funds (to the extent required).
- The expected contribution in increasing job opportunities.
- To meet a specific need and/or improve the consumer's experience and quality of life (cost savings, efficiency gains, product / service quality and reliability, etc.).
- The ability to provide solutions to existing social, environmental and other challenges.

Particular emphasis is given to the following elements that should be included in the description of the project proposal:



- Convincing description of the existence of substantial demand for the innovation (including willingness of end users to buy the product / service).
- The total expected market size (existing or new market), its expected growth rate and the market share that the business is targeting.
- The ability to disrupt or create a new market. The creation of new markets through the proposed innovative ideas is highly desirable.
- Effectiveness of the proposed measures for the management of Intellectual Property Rights.
The strategy for the protection and safeguarding of intellectual property rights, which are necessary for the implementation of the business plan of the company in order to achieve the maximum added value and benefit through the project, is evaluated. In particular, the following are evaluated:
 - The suitability and reliability of the knowledge protection strategy in order to ensure the “freedom to operate”, including ownership of intellectual property rights, any pending patent applications, as well as issues related to license exploitation.
 - The response to any requirements for compatibility with national, European and international laws and/or standards.

3. Implementation – Weight 35%

- Completeness and appropriateness of the Work Packages’ content, the allocation of the various activities, the timetable and the budget.

The completeness, reliability and appropriateness of the content of the project proposal, including the appropriateness of the timetable and the proposed budget, are evaluated. Particular emphasis is placed on the completeness and reliability of the following elements that should be included in the description of the project proposal in order to substantiate the potential to achieve the added value and benefit:

- Reliable description of targeted users or customers of the innovation, how their needs have been addressed and the reasons why they will want to use or buy the product / service compared to already available products / services.
- Realistic and reliable analysis of market conditions and factors that affect the market, including analysis of competitors and competitive offerings, and key market stakeholders.
- Prospects for success by disrupting or creating a new market.
- Realistic and reliable analysis of market entry strategy for the innovation and the way in which the innovation has the potential to achieve rapid growth-rates.
- Reliable and data-driven exit strategy for potential investors.
- Effectiveness of the proposed methodology for the implementation of the Project Proposal.
The effectiveness of the proposed methodology for the implementation of the project proposal is evaluated. Emphasis is given to the following:
 - The adoption of internationally established methodologies for the development of innovative products / services that enhance the potential for



the successful market penetration of their products and services and minimize the risk involved and the required penetration time.

- The degree of involvement of potential users in the development / validation process of products / services.
 - The inclusion of a suitable Go-To-Market strategy.
- Completeness, quality and capacity of the Consortium (at the level of organisations and/or persons) for the implementation of the Project Proposal and achievement of the proposed objectives.

The team involved in the implementation of the project proposal is assessed, with particular emphasis on the following:

- The availability of appropriate and complementary knowledge and skills among team members for both the technical / scientific part, as well as the financial part and the business environment.
- Having very good knowledge of the market which their products / services are targeting.
- The existence of leadership and management skills within the team, as well as the commitment shown by the team to implement the proposed project.

The capacity (including infrastructure/facilities/equipment, financial and human resources) and contribution of the Partner Organisations (in the case of a Consortium) to the implementation of the proposed project and the achievement of its objectives, as well as the need to involve third parties (e.g. subcontractors) to provide skills / technical knowledge that is not available within the team, is evaluated. At the same time, any already secured investments by private investors (e.g. Business Angels, seed funds, Venture Capitals, etc.), as well as the team's potential to secure private funds to cover the required own contribution for the project are considered.

- Suitability and adequacy of the proposed coordination and management activities, including identification and handling of potential risks (Contingency Plan).

In particular, the coordination and management activities of the proposed project are evaluated. The completeness and reliability of the Contingency Plan for the management of any risks and deviations in the implementation of the proposed project are also evaluated. Among other, emphasis is placed on the following:

- The feasibility of adopting a Minimum Viable Product approach for market entry, with the aim of testing the market and implementing any necessary adjustments.
- The development of alternative scenarios as well as the possibility of pivoting during the implementation of the project.

Selection



Proposals that are selected for funding are those that have been deemed, following evaluation, eligible for funding. It is understood that the total of the approved project funding will not exceed the total budget of the Call.

INFORMATION – CONTACT DETAILS

RIF Support Service

E-mail

support@research.org.cy

Telephone

+35722205000

The Research and Innovation Foundation may at its discretion, proceed to the extension or revocation of the present Call by applying the same publication procedure.