

Sustainable Transition to the Agile and Green Enterprise



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GUIDELINES FOR APPLICANTS

(Valid from July 2024)

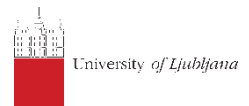
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PARTNERS



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Sustainable Transition to the Agile and Green Enterprise (STAGE) project is supporting the sustainability transition of European industrial SMEs by connecting, industry players, advisors and investors, providing training and supporting transition projects through a grant scheme.

These are the Guidelines for Applicants provides information on all the aspects of the Financial Grant Programme in the STAGE project (eligibility, application process, contractual arrangements, documentation requirements and reporting).

The STAGE Financial Grant programme will provide up to 25 000 EUR funding per SME to develop capacity and support sustainability transition. During a competitive process, SMEs will start the programme with a goal to receive private investment to finance their sustainable transition. STAGE does not provide investment, but grants for advisory services in the context of investments in sustainability transition projects. Grants are awarded for activities detailed in chapter 4 of this document; eligibility criteria are defined in chapter 7.

A call for proposals has been published in July 2024 call and will be closed on 31 December 2024. Companies can apply by registering into the platform www.stagepartners.eu and submitting a short application inside the project platform, "Applications" tab.

Companies meeting eligibility criteria will undergo the evaluation process. Applicants will receive financed according to evaluation results. Evaluation criteria and the process are described in chapter 8.



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GLOSSARY

Application Eligibility Criteria - criteria used to assess if an application can be considered for the programme;

Evaluation Panel – a committee taking the final decision in evaluation process according to the guidelines of the Open call.

Financial Grant - Financial support to third parties;

An investment plan - is a strategic approach to allocating and managing financial resources to achieve specific investment goals, considering factors such as risk tolerance, objectives, and time horizon; Minimal investment plan requirements are outlined in Appendix E.

Linked SME or Linked Enterprise - linked enterprises are those that form a group through the direct or indirect control of the majority of voting rights of an enterprise by another or through the ability to exercise a dominant influence on an enterprise;

Open call / Call - competitive process to access STAGE Financial Grant Programme;

Partner SME or Partner Enterprise - The enterprise holds a minimum of 25% (Capital or voting rights in another enterprise, or 25% (Capital or voting rights) are owned by another enterprise;

Private capital funding – funding acquired by the company in the form of private equity, venture capital, private debt, real estate, infrastructure from private sector (banks, private investors, private investment funds, internal company recourses, such as profit and other cash flows);

A project investment plan - is a strategic blueprint that outlines the allocation of financial resources for a specific project, considering factors such as budget, funding sources, anticipated returns, and risk assessment. Investment plan for sustainable transition outlines the allocation of financial resources and other factors for a project enabling company to move towards its sustainability goals.

Project Management Board - A board consisting of 5 project partners leading project work packages, responsible for call approval in STAGE Financial Grant Programme;

SME - An incorporated enterprise that complies with the rules defined by the European Commission to be qualified as an SME;

STAGE - project Sustainable Transition to the Agile and Green Enterprise;

STAGE Financial Grant Programme - direct funding provided by the STAGE project to support SMEs in the sustainability transition;

STAGE self-assessment - a tool in the STAGE platform allowing company to evaluate its current situation in the field of sustainability;

STAGE training - training programme in STAGE platform in various Sustainability topics.



1 INTRODUCTION

The STAGE, which aims to support SMEs in the process of their sustainability transition, is funded by the European Commission under the Horizon Europe programme. The Guidelines for Applicants is consisting of administrative and financial rules to define key aspects of the STAGE Financial Grant (Financial support to third parties, henceforward: Grant), it includes guidelines and templates for applicants to participate. The Guide for Applicants provides an overview of the STAGE Programme approach and detailed information how to participate in this Call.

This document describes roles, process and rules that will allow an efficient operation of the Financial Grant Programme as well as key governance principles on how the Financial Grant Programme will be managed, how it would be organised, evaluated, contracted and reported.

2 OVERVIEW OF FINANCIAL GRANT PROGRAMME

The Open Call is the competitive process by which SMEs apply to have access to the Financial Grant Program for Sustainability Transition in the STAGE project. The Financial Grant Programme provides direct funding to SMEs to support their sustainability transition.

The STAGE Financial Grant programme will provide up to 25 000 EUR funding per SMEs of diverse maturity levels to develop capacity and support sustainability transition. During a competitive process, SMEs will start the programme with a goal to receive private investment to finance their sustainable transition. STAGE does not provide investment; STAGE provides a Grant for advisory services in connection to the investment project.

Every call will be announced on the platform www.stagepartners.eu and various other communication channels such as the project's LinkedIn page. Companies receiving STAGE Grants will be asked to provide information for the impact assessment of STAGE reporting purposes both during and after the Grant activities are implemented.

The Lithuanian Innovation Centre acts as STAGE Open Call Coordinator and Data Controller for data collected through the STAGE platform for STAGE Financial Grant programme.

3 ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES

Grants are awarded to successful applicants to prepare for private investments which facilitates the transition to the sustainable and agile performance of the company.

The following activities are eligible:

1. Preparation of an investment project plan (minimal requirements for the investment plan are defined in the Appendix E);
2. Feasibility study;
3. Technology audit;
4. Due diligence analysis;
5. Data collection and analysis for carbon footprint assessment;



6. Adaptation of business processes;
7. Procurement of other specialised consultancy and coaching services related to investment plan preparation.

The Grant can be spent only for services of Sustainability Advisors registered in the platform. The SME is providing a Letter of Intent with a Sustainability Advisor registered on the STAGE platform about the intent to provide services for preparation of the investment project plan.

If a specialised consultancy service is needed, the requested consultant needs to register as a Sustainability Advisor in the platform and get approved.

4 FUNDING STRUCTURE

The STAGE Financial Grant Programme will provide up to 25 000 EUR lump sum to eligible SMEs and activities. The Grant is to be paid after signing Financial Support for Third Parties contract and proof has been presented and assessed for the execution of the services. The Grant must be implemented not later than 3 months after signing the Financial Support for Third Parties contract.

The SME will be required to provide documents demonstrating received services, such as investment plan, technology audit report, feasibility study and etc., according to the chosen services described in Section 3.

5 RECEIVING GRANTS AND FUNDING CONDITIONS

The following process summarizes the entire process from application process to reporting.

- **SME application for the STAGE Financial Grant Programme.** SME fills in the application form on the STAGE platform (www.stagepartners.eu login page > www.gnd.one/stage > Application tab, submits the sustainability transition plan and other documents required by the Open Call.
- **SME eligibility evaluation.** A call will have several evaluation cut-offs. The call is closed on the announced day of the application deadline. All the applications are checked if they meet the eligibility criteria according to criteria after each cut-off date.
- **Application evaluation according to evaluation criteria.** Eligible applications are evaluated according to pre-defined evaluation criteria. Highest scoring SMEs according to the evaluation criteria are granted the financing as long as funds are available. The final decision of approving the applications is taken in Evaluation Committee (Panel).
- **Contracting the Grant.** The grant will be paid as a lump-sum. The grant recipient undergoes contracting for Grant. A contract will have to be signed between the Lithuanian Innovation Centre (project STAGE partner responsible for Financial Grant Programme) and the grant recipient.
- **Reporting and payment.** The grant recipient implements the actions indicated in the application form and reports within 3 months from signing the contract. The grant recipient fills in Annex D Reporting template and provides the result of the service received (feasibility study, investment project plan, technology audit and etc.).



6 FINANCIAL GRANT PROGRAMME TIMELINE

Timeline for Call 4 of applications are as follows:

- Application period opens 15 July 2024 08:00 (Central European Time). It is published in EC portal and STAGE web page <https://stagepartners.eu/financial-grants>.
- Application period closes: 31 December 2024 (Central European Time).

Foreseen evaluation cut-off dates:

- a) 30 September 2024
- b) 15 November 2024
- c) 31 December 2024

7 ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

7.1 Type of Beneficiary

Accepted applicants for the STAGE Open Call are SMEs acting in various domains, including manufacturing and services. The eligibility criteria are defined with a view to privilege applicants whose sustainability transition projects are executable, i.e. almost investment ready for sustainable transition. These are the eligibility criteria for applicant companies:

1. An SME will be considered as such if complying with the European Commission Recommendation 2003/361/EC and the SME qualification guide.

An SME performs European Commission Self-assessment questionnaire: [SME Questionnaire \(europa.eu\)](#) and provides the results before signing the contract.

2. In case an SME enters the STAGE Financial Grant Programme it will remain eligible even if, at a certain point during the Grant execution, it does not fulfil criteria (b) or (c) of the SME definition.
3. The SMEs must not have had convictions for fraudulent behaviour, other financial irregularities, and unethical or illegal business practices.
4. The participating companies must not have been declared bankrupt or have initiated bankruptcy procedures.
5. It is not under liquidation or is not an enterprise under difficulty according to the Commission Regulation No 651/2014, art. 2.18.
6. It is not excluded from the possibility of obtaining EU funding under the provisions of both national and EU law, or by a decision of either national or EU authority.
7. Please note that a signed version of the Honour Declaration will be requested during the contract preparation phase.



7.2 Eligibility criteria for the project idea

1. The submitted project plan idea has to aim for the investment of €100.000 or more. This means the company is preparing the investment plan, feasibility study or chooses any other service from Chapter 3 for the project of 100 000 EUR investment or more.
2. The investment plan idea foresees technological excellence related action (examples: advanced industrial technologies being adopted, innovativeness of the solution, increase of digital readiness level, implementation of management standards, value stream management, new sustainable business models being implemented, sustainable energy and energy efficiency solutions).
3. The investment plan idea foresees a positive economic impact (examples: revenue growth, profit growth, created jobs, reduced waste, reduced carbon footprint, increased energy efficiency, increased energy costs savings)
4. The applicant fills in the Sustainability Transition Plan aiming towards a more sustainable enterprise and submits it with the application. Only companies which filled in Sustainability Transition Plan are eligible. Template for the Sustainability Transition Plan can be found on the [STAGE platform](#); the document is also provided together with application form in the STAGE platform Application tab.

7.3 Eligible Countries

Applicants eligible to receive funding through the Open Call are any legal entity established and based in one of the EU Member States or third countries associated to Horizon Europe as defined in Horizon Europe rules for participation (link to the document):

<https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/guidance/list-3rd-country-participation-horizon- Euratom-en.pdf>¹.

UK entities applying as beneficiaries in this call are not eligible, see the footnote 1.

Entities subject to EU restrictive measures under Article 29 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) and Article 215 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU) and entities covered by Commission Guidelines No 2013/C 205/05 are NOT eligible to participate in any capacity (including as beneficiaries, affiliated entities, associated partners, third parties giving in-kind contributions, subcontractors or recipients of financial support to third parties, if any).

7.4 Technological areas

The STAGE project involves SMEs from all 14 European Industrial Ecosystems defined by the EC including Textiles; Electronics; Mobility-Transport-Automotive; Energy-Intensive Industries; Renewable Energy; Agri-Food; Health; Digital; Construction; Retail; Proximity & Social Economy; Tourism; Creative & Cultural Industries;

¹ UK entities applying as beneficiaries in this call are not eligible. UK companies for Horizon Europe calls for proposals which implement budgetary commitments for 2021, 2022 and 2023 will not be able to receive EU funding, even if the signature of the grant agreement takes place in 2024 or later.



and Aerospace & Defence. Companies operating in these technological areas are eligible to be funded by the STAGE Financial Grant Programme.

STAGE will not finance any activity, production, use, distribution, business or trade involving:

1. Forced labour² or child labour³
2. Activities or materials deemed illegal under host country laws or regulations or international conventions and agreements, or subject to international phase-outs or bans, such as:
 - a) Ozone depleting substances, PCBs (Polychlorinated Biphenyls) and other specific, hazardous pharmaceuticals, pesticides/herbicides or chemicals;
 - b) Wildlife or products regulated under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species or Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES); or
 - c) Unsustainable fishing methods (e.g. blast fishing and drift net fishing in the marine environment using nets in excess of 2.5 km in length).
3. Cross-border trade in waste and waste products, unless compliant with the Basel Convention and the underlying regulations.
4. Destruction⁴ of High Conservation Value areas⁵
5. Radioactive materials⁶ and unbounded asbestos fibres
6. Pornography and/or prostitution
7. Racist and/or anti-democratic media
8. If any of the following products form a substantial part of a project's primary financed business activities⁷:
 - a) Alcoholic Beverages (except beer and wine);
 - b) Tobacco;
 - c) Weapons and munitions; or
 - d) Gambling, casinos and equivalent enterprises.
9. Coal prospection, exploration, mining or processing

² Forced labor means all work or service, not voluntarily performed, that is extracted from an individual under threat of force or penalty as defined by ILO conventions.

³ Persons may only be employed if they are at least 14 years old, as defined in the ILO Fundamental Human Rights

⁴ Destruction means the (1) elimination or severe diminution of the integrity of an area caused by a major, long-term change in land or water use or (2) modification of a habitat in such a way that the area's ability to maintain its role is lost.

⁵ High Conservation Value (HCV) areas are defined as natural habitats where these values are considered to be of outstanding significance or critical importance (See <http://www.hcvnetwork.org>).

⁶ This does not apply to the purchase of medical equipment, quality control (measurement) equipment or any other equipment where the radioactive source is understood to be trivial and/or adequately shielded.

⁷ For companies, "substantial" means more than 10 % of their consolidated balance sheets or earnings. For financial institutions and investment funds, "substantial" means more than 10% of their underlying portfolio volumes.



10. Oil exploration or production
11. Standalone fossil gas exploration and/or production⁸
12. Transport and related infrastructure primarily⁹ used for coal for power generation
13. Crude Oil Pipelines
14. Oil Refineries
15. Construction of new or refurbishment of any existing coal-fired power plant (including dual)
16. Construction of new or refurbishment of any existing HFO-only or diesel-only power plant¹⁰ producing energy for the public grid and leading to an increase of absolute CO2 emissions¹¹
17. Any business with planned expansion of captive coal used for power and/or heat generation¹²

8 EVALUATION CRITERIA AND PROCESS

Eligibility evaluation will be performed by a dedicated team of the Lithuanian Innovation Centre. According to the eligibility criteria the evaluation check list will be created and every applicant will be evaluated (yes/no):

- Companies will be asked to provide self-assessment results from [SME Questionnaire \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu).
- The application will be evaluated if the project plan idea aims for an investment of 100 000 EUR or more. This means the company is preparing the investment plan, feasibility study or chooses any other service from Chapter 3 for the project of 100 000 EUR investment or more.
- The application will be evaluated if the project idea and outcome have technological excellence.
- The application will be evaluated if the project idea and outcome have positive economic impact.
- The SME Sustainable transition plan is included. The submitted project idea for Grant is a part of sustainable transition plan implementation in the company.
- The idea is not falling under any activity, production, use, distribution, business or trade involving areas indicated in Chapter 7.4.1 – 7.4.17. Project idea is planned to be implemented in one or more of 14 European Industrial Ecosystems defined by the EC (Chapter 7.4).

⁸ Gas extraction from limnically active lakes is exempted from this exclusion

⁹ "Primarily" means more than 50% of the infrastructure's handled tonnage

¹⁰ For indirect equity through investment funds, investments (up to a maximum of 20% of the fund) in new or existing HFO-only or diesel-only power plants are allowed in countries that face challenges in terms of access to energy and under the condition that there is no economically and technically viable gas or renewable energy alternative.

¹¹ I.e. where energy efficiency measures do not compensate any capacity or load factor increase

¹² This does not apply to coal used to initiate chemical reactions (e.g. metallurgical coal mixed with iron ore to produce iron and steel) or as an ingredient mixed with other materials, given the lack of feasible and commercially viable alternatives



- The SME will be asked to provide the Letter of Intent about services of Sustainability Advisor from the STAGE platform before signing the Grant contract.

If some information is missing the SME is asked to submit additional information within a fixed deadline.

Eligible companies will be evaluated according to the below criteria. A final score is derived using the indicated weights:

1. Private investment amount foreseen in the project idea, EUR: 40 %
2. Cost effectiveness of the action, 0-10 score: 15 %
3. Headcount in Annual Work Unit (AWU) in the company: 15 %
4. The company turnover in last financial statement before the application is submitted: 15 %
5. The amount of balance sheet total: 15 %

Each criterion is multiplied by the weight percentage and added together. According to this calculated value of all criteria, the applicants are ranked. Highest scoring companies are financed until the total amount earmarked for Grants is depleted. After the eligibility check and evaluation, a list of Grant beneficiaries is compiled, ranked by the overall score. Highest scoring companies are financed

The eligibility checking process and application evaluation should take approximately four weeks.

The final list of companies receiving the Grants is confirmed by Evaluation Panel within 14 days after the evaluation.

9 APPLICATION AND CONTRACTING PROCESS

A Guide for applicants can be downloaded from the following link <https://stagepartners.eu/financial-grants>.

The STAGE project platform www.stagepartners.eu is used for submitting the applications; once registered and logged on, the company can apply on the platform in the Applications tab.

To apply to the STAGE Financial Grant Programme, it is mandatory to complete an Initial Assessment and submit the Sustainability Transition Plan. Completing the Performance Assessment is not mandatory, however, completing this assessment will help prepare the Sustainability Transition Plan. Therefore, completion of the Performance Assessment is strongly recommended.

The steps for applying to STAGE Financial Grant Programme:

- **Registration.** A representative of an SME should register to participate in the STAGE programme by filling out the registration inquiry form on www.stagepartners.eu. Initial registration only requires the most basic information including industry type, company name, and country of operation. During the registration process, the company fills in the Initial Assessment.
- **Preparation of the Sustainability Transition Plan.** A Sustainability Transition Plan template is available on the STAGE platform in the Academy Template section and in the Application tab next to the other Call documents. Company downloads the template, fills it in and submits together with application.



- **Engaging with Sustainability Advisors (SA).** Once a company has access to the platform, they will be provided with profiles of Sustainability Advisors (SAs) who have registered with STAGE and are familiar with the STAGE Programme. SAs may also bring SMEs to the STAGE platform – and vice-versa, in which case it is expected, but not necessary that they continue to work together throughout the STAGE programme. A company may ask the consultant they are working with to register to the platform and be a Sustainability Advisor in the STAGE platform for that company.

SAs may support the SME in developing a Transition Plan, applying for STAGE Financial Grant Programme, or any other consultancy service company needs. The SME and SA shall develop a bilateral agreement on services provided, applying process is not reimbursed by STAGE Grant programme.

- **Submit the STAGE Financial Grant Programme application.** The Grant application is submitted on the platform www.stagepartners.eu (www.gnd.one/stage), Applications tab. Together with the application the following documents need to be submitted:
 - Application form;
 - Sustainability Transition Plan
 - Declaration of Honor for STAGE Financial Grant Programme.

If the applicant discovers an error in the proposal, and provided the call deadline has not passed, the applicant may correct the application and re-submit the proposal. If a proposal is resubmitted, the time stamp considered is the one of the final submissions.

The application and supporting documents (Sustainability Transition Plan and Declaration of Honor) has to be submitted before the deadline indicated in the chapter 6. Only proposals submitted within the Open Call duration will be accepted. It is recommended to submit the proposal at the earliest time possible. Failure of the proposal to arrive in time for any reason, including network communications delays or working from multiple browsers or multiple browser windows, is not acceptable as an extenuating circumstance. Late submissions are not permitted. The time of receipt of the application as recorded by the submission system will be definitive.

The application process will close on the date and time mentioned in Section 6. There will not be any deadline extensions unless there is a Force Majeure situation (e.g., a major problem caused by the STAGE platform and not by the applicants, which makes the system unavailable for a long period).

Applications sent by post or email will not be accepted.

Expenses incurred in the preparation of the applications and contracting will not be reimbursed.

10 PARTICIPATION OF SUSTAINABILITY ADVISORS IN THE FINANCIAL GRANT PROGRAMME

Sustainability Advisors participate in the STAGE Financial Grant Programme as service providers, preparing project investment plans or providing service needed in the process of investment plan preparation and/or other services indicated in the chapter 3.

The Grant can be spent only on services of the SA registered in the platform STAGE, login page can be accessed from website www.stagepartners.eu.



SAs register to the platform providing general information as well as acquired qualification. After providing the information SA will be confirmed by the consortium and they will have the possibility to provide services to the SMEs participating in the Financial Grant Programme.

11 GRANTS AND NUMBER OF COMPANIES TO BE SUPPORTED

The STAGE consortium can provide 94 Grants up to 25 000 EUR in the form of lump sum, to be used by each of the SMEs to pay for services defined in the section 3. Access to the Grants is granted according to the selection procedures defined in section 5.

The STAGE project is committed to support SMEs across Europe and Horizon Europe Associated countries. There is no restriction on the number of companies supported per country.

12 LANGUAGE

English is the only official language of the STAGE Project. Applications written in any other language will not be eligible and will not be evaluated. English is also the only official language during the whole execution of the STAGE Financial Grant Programme. This means that all communication will be in English, and all deliverables have to be submitted in English.

13 DOCUMENT FORMATS

Unless otherwise stated in specific sections of the application form, any document requested in any of the phases must be submitted electronically in PDF format without restrictions for printing.

14 MULTIPLE SUBMISSIONS

Only one application will be accepted per SME. In case an SME submits more than one application, only the application submitted last will be considered. All previous applications will be deemed ineligible.

If the application was granted the financing, all other applications submitted by the SME will be deemed ineligible.

Proposals from a partner or linked SMEs (see table of Terms and Definitions) must demonstrate that there is no risk of double funding. The fundamental principle underpinning the rules for public expenditure in the EU states that no costs for the same activity can be funded twice from the EU budget, as defined in the Article 111 of Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 1605/2002 of 25 June 2002 on the Financial Regulation.

15 ABSENCE OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST



Applicants shall not have any actual or/and potential conflict of interest with the STAGE Project selection process and during the project implementation. All cases of conflict of interest will be assessed on a case by case by an evaluation committee.

16 ETHICAL ISSUES

The beneficiaries of STAGE must commit to and ensure the respect of basic EU values, such as human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and Human Rights, including the rights of minorities.

17 DATA PROTECTION

To process and evaluate applications, as well as approve Grants STAGE will need to collect Personal and Business Data. The Lithuanian Innovation Centre, as the Open Call Coordinator, will act as Data Controller for data collected through the STAGE platform for STAGE Financial Grant programme. The STAGE platform's system design and operational procedures ensure that data is managed in compliance with The General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR). Each applicant will be requested to accept the STAGE Platform terms to ensure this coverage.

18 INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Formal and informal communications channels will be agreed with SMEs selected to the STAGE Financial Grant Programme. Indicative rules are as follows:

Formal communications, all that may have an impact on the contract performance and evaluation will be performed via email. Beneficiaries will need to notify the project partner Lithuanian Innovation Centre of updates in contact persons and email addresses.

19 GENERAL TERMS AND BENEFICIARIES' OBLIGATIONS

All payments will be done in Euro. Payment will be done separately to each beneficiary. Only costs that occur during the project period are eligible for funding. Terms of payment:

Lump sum payment. There is no advanced payment. The report (Appendix D Reporting template) is evaluated within 10 working days after it is submitted. The payment is made within 10 working days after the report is approved by the Lithuania Innovation Centre (STAGE partner responsible for Financial Grant Programme).



The STAGE Financial Grant Programme relies on a lump sum mechanism for its grants. This simplified method of setting expenses in projects means that you are not required to present accounting documents proving your costs during the project.

However, SME still has the obligation to demonstrate that the implementation of the activities described in the project plan is in line with the deliverables and milestones as defined.

This comes with a set of obligations that STAGE Financial Grant Programme beneficiaries have to follow:

- The beneficiary SME shall make available directly to the EC all detailed information and data that may be requested by the EC or any representative authorised by it, with a view to verifying that the grant agreement is properly managed and performed in accordance with its provisions and that costs have been charged in compliance with it. This information and data must be precise, complete, and effective.
- The beneficiary SME shall keep all Grant deliverables and the originals or, in exceptional cases, duly authenticated copies – including electronic copies – of all documents relating to the Grant contract for up to five years from the end of the STAGE project. These shall be made available to the EC were requested during any audit under the grant agreement.
- To carry out these audits, the beneficiary SME shall ensure that the EC's services and any external body(ies) authorised by it have on-the-spot access at all reasonable times, notably to the Grant applicant offices, to its computer data, to its accounting data and to all the information needed to carry out those audits, including information on individual salaries of persons involved in the project. They shall ensure that the information is readily available on the spot at the moment of the audit and, if so requested, that data be handed over in an appropriate form.
- In the context of assessing the impact of the project, the European Commission requires the STAGE project and its partners to report a number of parameters both during, at the end and 5 years after the project concludes (May 2030). Upon request, the Beneficiary agrees to support the STAGE project, its partners and any party acting on behalf of the STAGE project or one of its partners by compiling and providing sustainability-related and general organizational data to assess the progress of the project; the STAGE Impact Assessment Reports list all the data points in question. Data will only be communicated to external parties in an anonymized and aggregated manner. In all other cases, the Beneficiary will be consulted and asked for explicit permission.
- The beneficiaries also have a visibility obligation to make appear on their communication materials related to this Grant (flyers, roll up, online publication, etc.) the European flag and a funding statement and the STAGE logo. This EU flag must remain distinct and separate and cannot be modified by adding other visual marks or text. The EU logo, when displayed in association with other logo must be displayed at least as prominently and visibly as the other logos¹³.
- Ethics and values, the beneficiaries of STAGE must commit to and ensure the respect of basic EU values, such as human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and Human Rights, including the rights of minorities.
- Confidentiality and security: The beneficiaries of STAGE must keep confidential any data or documents that is identified as 'sensitive'
- IPR: SMEs will in any case keep the integral ownership of results developed under STAGE support scheme. Nevertheless, STAGE project keeps the right to use non-sensitive information relating to the action for communications and dissemination purposes:

¹³ https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/managing-your-project/communicating-and-raising-eu-visibility_en#:~:text=Under%20the%20EU%20budget%202021,of%20any%20EU%20funding%20received



- the name of the beneficiary SME;
- contact address of the beneficiary SME;
- the general purpose of the project;
- the amount of the financial contribution foreseen for the project; after the final payment, and the amount of the financial contribution actually received.
 - the geographic location of the activities carried out.
 - the list of dissemination activities and/or of patent (applications) relating to foreground.
 - the details/references and the abstracts of scientific publications relating to foreground and, if funded within the Grant, the published version or the final manuscript accepted for publication.
 - the publishable reports submitted to STAGE.
 - any picture or any audio-visual or web material provided to the EC and STAGE in the framework of the project.

20 STAGE PROJECT OVERVIEW

Sustainability and the transition to a low-carbon, more resource-efficient and circular economy are key in ensuring the long-term competitiveness of the European Union (EU) economy. Sustainability is at the heart of the European Union and the EU Treaties giving recognition to its social and environmental dimensions.

Advanced industrial technologies are the core of the Industry 4.0, shaping the future of production and value chains. It opens opportunities for companies to shape a new wave of economic growth. Industry accounts for 21% of human emissions – one and a half times as much as all the world’s cars, trucks, ships, trains, and planes combined [1]. According to the Circularity Gap Report 2021, circular economy strategies alone can cut global greenhouse gas emissions by 39% and help avoid climate breakdown. The 22.8 billion tones (Gt) of annual emissions associated with creating new products from materials can be eliminated by applying circular strategies that drastically reduce the amounts of materials consumed [2].

The Sustainable Transition to the Agile and Green Enterprise (STAGE) project is creating an ecosystem for the sustainability transition of European industrial SMEs. The STAGE project is developing a platform for effective collaboration between industry players and for support of convergence between manufacturing processes, supply chains and frameworks for assistance, training, and support for SMEs. The key aspects include product design (demand analytics, product engineering, value chains); production automation (data analytics, robotics, internet cloud infrastructure, additive manufacturing), circular economy (advanced materials, renewable sources, energy efficiency, recycling processes, waste management, environmental standards), and sustainable financing (ESG assessment, investment readiness assessment, business valuation, capital budgeting, access to capital). The STAGE project consortium aims to transform European industrial SMEs into globally leading agile and green enterprises.

The STAGE project is creating the sustainability transition ecosystem, training Sustainability Advisors and providing high-quality sustainability transition services to at least 2000 European industrial SMEs during the project duration, transforming SMEs into the agile and green enterprises, competitive and sustainable leaders of the European industrial economy.



20.1 Objectives of the STAGE project

- Assessment of the SME’s Innovation and Sustainability STAGE.
- Design and Development of the Sustainability Transition Infrastructure (STAGE Platform).
- Development of Decentralized Open-Source Sustainability Training Courses.
- Training Sustainability Advisors and Supporting European Industrial SMEs.
- Building the STAGE Ecosystem for long term performance.
- Engaging and Recruiting at least 2000 European Industrial SMEs (during the project).
- Providing Financial Support for the Implementation of SME Sustainability Transition Plans (Grant for SMEs).

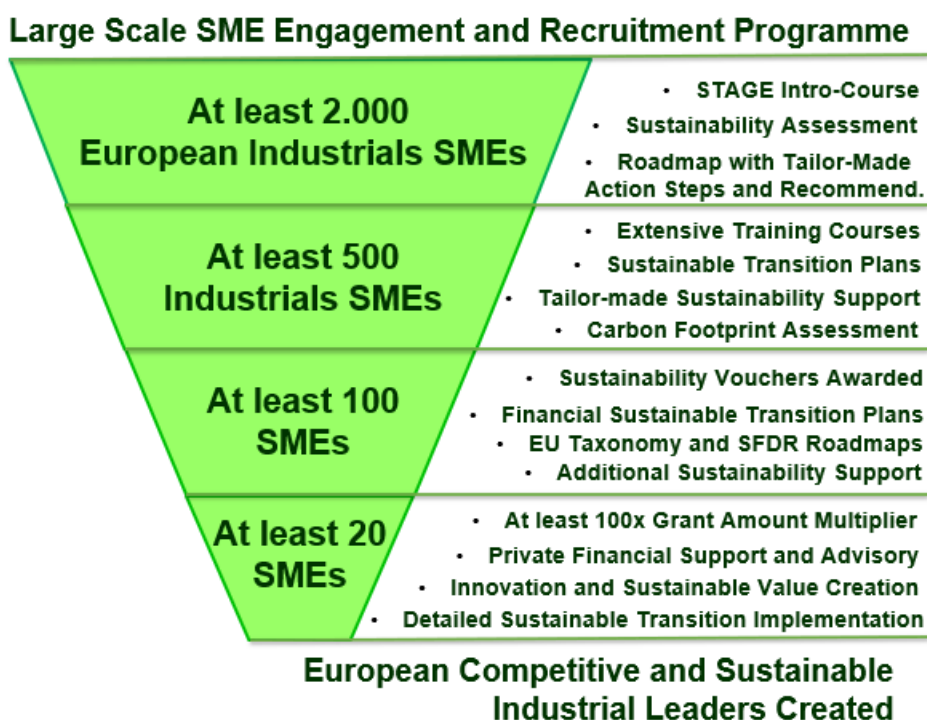


Figure 1 Project STAGE SME Engagement and Recruitment Programme, STAGE project proposal

Project duration - Project ends in May 2025.

20.2 STAGE transformation journey

From the perspective of the SME there is a possibility to undergo sustainability transformation journey. Companies will receive maximum benefit if they choose the whole transformation journey (one full cycle) using all the tools offered by STAGE.

STAGE TRANSFORMATION JOURNEY



Figure 2 Project STAGE transformation journey

To apply for STAGE Financial Grant Programme, it is mandatory to complete Initial Assessment and complete the template Sustainability Transition Plan. Completing Performance Assessment is not mandatory, however completing this assessment will help to prepare Sustainability Transition Plan.

21HELP DESK

If you have any questions about STAGE Financial Grant Programme, please contact the Help Desk by the email: stage@lic.lt.



REFERENCES

- [1] Circle Economy, Circularity Gap Report 2021, <https://www.circle-economy.com/resources/circularity-gap-report-2021>
- [2] United States Environmental Protection Agency, Global Greenhouse Gas Emissions Data, 2022, <https://www.epa.gov/ghgemissions/global-greenhouse-gas-emissions-data>



APPENDIX A APPLICATION FORM

STAGE Financial Grant Programme Application Form

Date __-__-2024

PART I General data

Project full title:

(max 200 characters)

 Application is submitted first time Application is resubmitted**Company name:****Company registration code:****Country of company residence:****Responsible person and contact email, phone for this application:****Country of company residence:****Company data** Company is independent (not linked or owned by another enterprise), in accordance with Recommendation 2003/361/EC Company is linked to (Company name and registration number):**Company size** (according to the last confirmed financial statement):

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Headcount in Annual Work Unit (AWU) | |
| Annual turnover, EUR | |
| Annual balance sheet total, EUR | |



Project type:

- Preparation of an investment project plan;
- Feasibility study;
- Technology audit;
- Due diligence analysis;
- Data collection and analysis for carbon footprint assessment;
- Adaptation of business processes;
- Procurement of other specialised consultancy and coaching services related to investment plan preparation

Industrial sector(s) addressed by the project (max 300 characters):

Duration of the project (number of months): ____

PART II EXCELLENCE

Specific project objectives. Please describe a broader scope of the sustainable transition project idea that the company is seeking investment for (max 2000 characters)

Describe the specific objectives for the project, which should be clear, measurable, realistic and achievable within the duration of the project.

Estimated investment project idea aims for the investment of the size, EUR _____

| Investment type | Estimated investment amount, Eur |
|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| | |
| | |
| Total | |



Technological excellence of the project (max 1500 characters)

Describe which technologies, architectures, processes and methodologies you will use to obtain the results and how you will use them according to the objectives (examples: advanced industrial technologies being adopted, innovativeness of the solution, increase of digital readiness level, implementation of management standards, value stream management, new sustainable business models being implemented, sustainable energy and energy efficiency solutions and etc.)

Economic impact of the project (max 1500 characters)

Describe the economic impact of the project (examples: revenue growth, profit growth, created jobs, reduced waste, reduced carbon footprint, increased energy efficiency, increased energy costs savings and etc.)

Budget

Indicate how the Grant will be spent. The grant covers expenses, therefore please indicate all the expenses, which you want to be financed by the Grant

Only purchase costs (subcontracting) are eligible in this Grant.

| No. | Item (what will be acquired) and what will be the result of this | Amount |
|-----|--|--------------------|
| 1 | Example: Financial analysis consisting of a) ; b); c) and etc. | Example: 5 000 EUR |
| | | |



APPENDIX B SUSTAINABILITY ADVISOR LETTER OF INTENT

[Your Name]

[Your Address, City, State, ZIP]

[Email Address]

[Phone Number]

[Date]

Project STAGE consortium

Application Evaluation Panel

www.stagepartners.eu

Letter of Intent for Participation in STAGE Financial Grant Programme

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to confirm my participation as a Sustainability Advisor in the STAGE Financial Grant Programme organized by project STAGE consortium. I am delighted to be a part of this initiative and contribute to the _____(company name) promotion of sustainable practices and investment.

I understand that my role as a Sustainability Advisor entails providing guidance and recommendations to foster environmental sustainability within the organization of my client. By leveraging my expertise in sustainable practices and/or finances, I aim to assist my client in developing effective strategies and investment to minimize environmental impact, enhance resource efficiency, and promote responsible consumption and production.

I am fully committed to dedicating my time and knowledge to fulfil the responsibilities associated with the position of a Sustainability Advisor. I will actively engage with my client team, participate in meetings, workshops, and collaborative sessions, and provide valuable insights to support sustainability goals.

Yours sincerely,

[Your Name]



APPENDIX C DECLARATION OF HONOUR

Declaration of Honor for STAGE Financial Grant Programme

I, [Your Full Name], hereby declare and affirm that all information provided in this funding application is true, accurate, and complete to the best of my knowledge and belief. I understand that any misrepresentation, omission, or falsification of information may result in the rejection of my application or the revocation of any funds granted.

I acknowledge that the purpose of this funding application is to seek financial support for the stated project or initiative. I am committed to utilizing the funds for the intended purpose outlined in this application and in accordance with the guidelines and criteria set forth by the funding organization or entity.

I affirm, that my organisation :

- a. Is NOT subject to an administrative sanction (i.e exclusion or financial penalty decision)
- b. Is NOT in one of the following exclusion situations:
 - i. Bankrupt, being wound up, having the affaires administered by the courts, entered into an arrangement with creditors, suspended business activities or subject to any other similar proceedings or procedures
 - ii. In breach of social security or tax obligations
- c. My organisation (or persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the grant) is not:
 - i. Guilty of grave professional misconduct
 - ii. Committed fraud, corruption, links to a criminal organisation, money laundering, terrorism-related crimes (including terrorism financing), child labour or human trafficking.
 - iii. Shown significant deficiencies in complying with main obligations under an EU procurement contract, grant agreement or grant decision.
 - iv. Guilty of irregularities within the meaning of Article 1(2) if Regulation No 2988/95
 - v. Created under a different jurisdiction with the intent to circumvent fiscal, social or other legal obligations in the country of origin (including creation of another entity with this purpose).

I affirm, that my organization:

- a) is NOT subject to a conflict of interest in connection with this grant and will notify without delay any situation which could give rise to a conflict of interest.
- b) has NOT and will NOT, neither directly nor indirectly, grant, seek, obtain or accept any advantage in connection with this grand that would constitute an illegal practice or involve corruption
- c) has not received any other EU Grant for this project and will give notice of any future EU grants related to this project AND of any EU operating grant(s) given to my organisation

I further declare that I will exercise utmost transparency, accountability, and responsible stewardship in managing the funds if they are granted. I will provide accurate and timely reports on the progress, achievements, and financial expenditure related to the project, as per the requirements stipulated by the funding organization.



I understand and accept that the funding organization reserves the right to verify the information provided in this application through appropriate means, including but not limited to contacting references, conducting site visits, and requesting supporting documentation.

I affirm my commitment to upholding ethical standards and conducting myself with integrity throughout the application process and, if awarded, during the implementation of the funded project. I will comply with all relevant laws, regulations, and ethical guidelines applicable to the project and ensure that the funds are used exclusively for the intended purposes outlined in the application.

In the event that any material changes occur that may impact the project's feasibility, execution, or adherence to the funding organization's guidelines, I will promptly notify the organization and seek their guidance and approval for any necessary adjustments.

I understand the significance of this declaration of honor and the trust bestowed upon me by the funding organization. I am fully aware that any violation of this declaration may result in the termination of funding, legal consequences, and damage to my reputation and future eligibility for funding opportunities.

I acknowledge(s) that to process and evaluate the proposal, STAGE project will need to collect personal and industrial data used in your application form. Lithuanian Innovation Centre will act as Data Controller for data submitted. The process and all data collected are managed in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR).

By affixing my signature below, I affirm my commitment to the principles stated in this declaration and my understanding of the importance of honesty, transparency, and accountability in the funding application and management process.

Signed,

[Your Full Name, Position]

[Date]



APPENDIX D REPORTING TEMPLATE

STAGE Financial Grant Programme Technical report

Date __-__-202__

Project full title:

(max 200 characters)

Company name:

Company registration code:

Country of company residence:

Responsible person and contact email, phone for this report:

Contract number:

Project type indicated in the application:

- Preparation of the investment project plan;
- Feasibility study;
- Technology audit;
- Due diligence analysis;
- Data collection and analysis for carbon footprint assessment;
- Adaptation of business processes;
- Procurement of other specialised consultancy and coaching services related to investment plan preparation

Implemented activities

Describe in the table below what activities were implemented, how the grant was spent (as it was indicated in the application form) and what results were achieved

| No | Implemented activity and the result | Invoice number | Invoice issued by | Amount |
|----|-------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------|--------|
| 1 | | | | |
| n. | | | | |

Name

Signature



APPENDIX E INVESTMENT PROJECT PLAN MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS

Investment Project Plan Minimum Requirements

An investment plan is a structured approach to investing money over a period of time. It involves setting investment goals, determining an appropriate asset allocation strategy, selecting specific investments that align with the strategy, and regularly reviewing and adjusting the plan as needed.

An investment plan for a company is a detailed roadmap or strategy that outlines how the company plans to invest its financial resources to achieve its financial and strategic goals. The investment plan may include a range of investment options, such as stocks, bonds, real estate, and other assets, and may be focused on short-term or long-term objectives.

STAGE project does not require general investment strategy, but a very specific project investment plan enabling company towards sustainable transition. The intended use of project investment plan is to acquire investment for this project in the market.

Minimum requirement for the content of investment project plan for STAGE Financial Grant Programme

| Part of the investment plan | Information provided in the part of the investment plan |
|--|--|
| Description of the planned investment project (including sustainability aspects) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Objectives of the investment project (including sustainability aspects of it) Project background, context and rationale Description of the project and sustainability solution Market analysis and barriers Summary of expected impacts (including sustainability) Summary of investment components Local stakeholder analysis Ownership of assets and management structure |
| Legal Analysis | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal requirements applicable to the planned investment Possible legal/regulatory incentives and obstacles |
| Economic and Financial analysis | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Estimated costs and revenues for the investment project (including sustainability transition) |



| | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| | <p>Economic viability (cost-effectiveness, profitability, financial stability, return on investment and etc.)</p> <p>Planned financing approach and funding sources</p> <p>Risk management of the investment project</p> |
| Investment Implementation Roadmap | Work plan (timeline, recourse requirements, responsibilities) |

This investment plan template is a minimum requirement. Applicants may expand the structure of this template according to the investment plan needs (feasibility study, technical solutions, financial indicators and etc.)

