



HEROES4REGIONS

Joint Practice-Oriented Scientific Research Hub

T5.4. Select and pilot small-scale cooperation projects

Manual of the 1st Call for Proposals (March 2026)



Co-funded by
the European Union

1. Objective

The HEROES4REGIONS Joint Practice-Oriented Scientific Research Hub seeks to stimulate bottom-up, cross-institutional cooperation among HEROES partners in the fields of practice-oriented scientific research, innovation, knowledge transfer, and valorisation, all aligned with the thematic area of **Smart Regional Resilience**.

Through this call, interinstitutional researcher teams are invited to pilot **small-scale applied research-oriented cooperation projects** that can also involve local and regional stakeholders, citizens and students, strengthening collaborative capacities and promoting co-creation across institutions and communities. Selected teams receive seed funding designed to activate promising collaborations with strong potential for future expansion and long-term impact.

The call focuses on encouraging researchers at HEROES partners that have or are developing ambitions to enter into research collaborations at European level. The call provides a lean, low-threshold opportunity for teams to test new cooperation formats, reinforce cross-institutional collaboration, and explore innovative approaches to practice-oriented scientific research, innovation, knowledge transfer, and valorisation.

In addition, the proposals will also serve as an inspiration for challenge-based learning initiatives within the HEROES Alliance.

2. Scope of the Call

The call supports small-scale research-oriented cooperation projects that contribute to the HEROES Alliance's focus on smart regional resilience, the capacity of regions to anticipate, adapt, and recover from disruptions through the strategic use of smart technologies, innovative solutions, and community engagement. Eligible projects should strengthen cross-border, **interinstitutional collaboration in research, innovation, knowledge transfer, or valorisation** related to one or more of the Alliance's three priority areas:

- people's resilience
- businesses' resilience
- nature's resilience

2.1 Activities that can be funded

Proposals must include activities in line with the objective of the call. Possible activities include:

- ✓ Capacity-building and network-building activities
- ✓ Thematic brainstorming sessions involving local stakeholders
- ✓ Joint analyses laying the groundwork for future joint research proposition and external funding acquisition
- ✓ Skills-building or methodology-focused training (for research staff)
- ✓ General capacity-building for collaboration across research pods
- ✓ Hackathons, co-creation labs, or workshops involving local stakeholders and/or citizens
- ✓ Research & Innovation capacity-building toolbox development
- ✓ Any other innovative or creative activity that strengthens interinstitutional collaboration in research, innovation, knowledge transfer, and valorisation.

Students, PhD candidates, teaching staff, and administrative support staff may be involved in activities where appropriate.

When proposing a small-scale cooperation, applicants are encouraged to take into account the **established thematic research 'pods'** (agriculture and food; care and well-being; circular economy; digital transformation; education, learning & inclusion; regional development); **the joint protocol for opening access to research infrastructure and facilities** and **the overview of research management structures (D5.1)**.



2.2 Ineligible activities and costs

- ✗ Research and innovation activities per se
- ✗ Research data collection, analysis, or lab work
- ✗ Writing of external funding proposals
- ✗ External consultancy for proposal development
- ✗ Scientific conferences or scientific publications
- ✗ Fieldwork, surveys, research experiments
- ✗ Activities taking place outside HEROES partner countries
- ✗ Financial support to third parties

3. Funding Framework

3.1 Budget

- €243,000 total (reserved)
- €27,000 per partner (3 calls × €9,000 reserved for each partner)
- €81,000 per call
- About 9 projects per call, valued at max. €9,000 each
- Any funds not used within a call will be carried over to the next calls (2028, 2029), ensuring that remaining resources can be allocated to future project selections.
- Co-funding in the form of staff time is required.

3.2 Who can receive funding?

- Only **main beneficiaries** (9 HEROES partner institutions) can receive funding
- **Associated partners cannot receive funding**, even if they are involved in activities.
- **Third parties cannot receive funding, even if they are involved in activities**

3.3 Eligible cost categories

- ✓ Purchase costs
- ✓ Consumables
- ✓ Services for meetings, workshops, seminars
- ✓ Services for communication/promotion/dissemination

For travel, accommodation, and subsistence costs, it is recommended to use additional funds where appropriate, unless otherwise agreed upon by the main applicant and the consortium.

3.4 Cost model

The cost model follows a lump sum approach:

- Fixed contribution up to **€9,000 per project**
- Application includes **brief cost estimate**
- **“Value for money” is part of evaluation**
- Payment after **approval AND completion (internal allocation)**
- No detailed cost statements required
- Focus on **activities and results**, not expenses



- Main applicant (1 partner) pays invoices and manages internal documentation
- Co-funding required (staff costs)

4. Eligibility Requirements

- **Involvement of a minimum of three HEROES institutions (beneficiaries)**
Each project must include the active participation of researchers and/or research support staff from at least three HEROES partner institutions (beneficiaries). In addition to the full partners, HEROES-associated higher education institutions (see Appendix F) may also participate. All participating institutions must contribute meaningfully to the planned activities and intended outcomes.
- **Clear alignment with Smart Regional Resilience**
Proposed activities must demonstrate a clear and explicit link to the HEROES Alliance's thematic focus on Smart Regional Resilience, addressing one or more of its priority dimensions (people's resilience, businesses' resilience, or nature's resilience). Proposals should show how the project contributes to research, innovation, knowledge transfer, or valorisation within this thematic area.
- **Engagement of relevant stakeholders**
Projects must ensure the involvement of key stakeholders, such as students, citizens, SMEs, public authorities, NGOs, and/or HEROES Friends. Their participation should support co-creation, knowledge exchange, capacity building, or regional relevance, and contribute to strengthening the small-scale project's collaborative and potential for expansion.

5. Call Timeline

CALL 1 (2026)

- **March 2026:** Opening of the call
- **30 April 2026:** Deadline for submissions (institutional responsible)
- **04 May – 15 May 2026:** Selection and evaluation by partners (see below)
- **21 May 2026:** Consolidation and agreement on the project ranking
- **From 26 May 2026:** Communication of results
- **From 1 September 2026:** Start of the projects from call 1
- End report call 1: upon completion of the project (at the latest by 30 June 2027).

Funded projects must be completed within a maximum of 9 months after the start date.

The timing for the call in 2027 will follow a similar timeline.

6. Submission Procedure

6.1 Application Format

The lead applicant submits their application using the application form template (see appendix B) that includes the following information (max. 3 pages):

- Project title



Co-funded by
the European Union

- Lead applicant (name, email address, institution)
- Involved partner institutions (names, institutions)
- Alignment with Smart Regional Resilience (short explanation – max. 2 sentences)
- Main objective of the small-scale cooperation
- Target group(s)
- Stakeholder involvement (students, citizens, SMEs, authorities, NGOs, HEROES Friends)
- Planned activities and timeline
- Expected outputs and expected impact
- Potential for expansion
- Budget

Applications must be submitted in English.

6.2 Submission method

Applications must be submitted by email to the institutional coordinator responsible for the call (see appendix A). Each HEROES institution will communicate the relevant email address and internal submission procedure to its staff.

7. Evaluation and Selection

Pre-selection at Institutional Level

The evaluation and selection process for Call 1 combines a decentralized pre-selection at institutional level with centralized final selection at project level.

In the **first step**, each HEROES partner institution is responsible for reviewing proposals submitted by its own staff acting as main applicants. All submitted proposals undergo an **eligibility check** to ensure compliance with the call requirements, including consortium composition, alignment with Smart Regional Resilience, and stakeholder involvement.

Eligible proposals are assessed by the institution's designated evaluation team using the joint evaluation criteria and evaluation form template (see appendix D). Based on this assessment, each institution may pre-select **a maximum of 3 proposals**. Institutions may invite shortlisted applicants to an online Pitch Day, which may form part of the institutional pre-selection process.

Only proposals pre-selected at institutional level are forwarded to the next stage.

In the **second step**, all institutionally pre-selected proposals are evaluated by the WP5 Working Group Evaluation Committee. The group conducts a comparative assessment using the same joint evaluation criteria to ensure consistency, transparency, and equal treatment across institutions.

Based on this evaluation, the WP5 Working Group Evaluation Committee makes the **final selection of 9 proposals** for funding under Call 1.

The evaluation criteria are:

- Alignment with the focus area of Smart Regional Resilience
- Innovative character of the proposed cooperation
- Expected impact (on institutional collaboration, the region, and society)
- (Local) stakeholder involvement (organisations or citizens)
- Potential for future expansion of the cooperation (e.g., leverage for external funding)
- Feasibility and value for money



Each criterion will be scored on a scale from 0 to 10 by the partner's selection team, accompanied by a brief justification.

Conflict of interest: evaluators may not assess proposals in which they are personally involved.

After institutional scoring of projects submitted by their own main applicants, the project rankings are consolidated and validated at Alliance level. Final results are then communicated according to the call timeline.

Funded projects receive a lump sum allocated internally through the main applicant's institution, according to its financial procedures and rules.

9. Reporting & Payment

Funded projects must submit a short final report upon completion of the activities (by 30 June 2027 at the latest), using the report template (see appendix E). The brief report includes:

- Summary of activities carried out and active involvement of all partners
- Overview of participating institutions and stakeholders
- Short description of outputs and achieved results
- Brief reflection on impact and potential for further collaboration
- Confirmation that activities were implemented as planned
- Mandatory documents documenting the activities (e.g., pictures, attendance lists, meeting minutes, dissemination and communication materials)

No financial reporting or cost statements are required.

The lump sum (up to €9,000) is transferred to the main applicant's department and relevant cost centre only after approval of the final report by the institutional coordinator responsible for the call. There is no automatic financial distribution among partners.

If the activities were not implemented as described in the application, the Alliance may reduce or refuse the lump sum.

The main applicant must retain invoices and receipts according to institutional financial rules and accounting standards.

The main applicant must be prepared to contribute to the *HEROES Science Magazine* (developed within WP7), to disseminate project results or communicate about the cooperation.

Small-scale cooperation projects follow the requirements on communication as set out in the Grant Agreement.

10. Data protection and Intellectual property

All activities must comply with GDPR and institutional data protection guidelines, particularly when involving students, citizens, or other stakeholders.

Intellectual property rights remain with the institutions that created the outputs, in line with their institutional policies. For jointly developed results, participating partners must agree on ownership and usage rights.

Project teams are encouraged to share non-sensitive outputs within the HEROES Alliance to support collaboration. All materials must respect third-party intellectual property rights.



11. Appendices

Appendix A — List of Institutional responsible of the Call

Institution	Name	e-mail
FON	Bas Ouwehand	b.ouwehand@fontys.nl
HH	Magnus Jonsson	magnus.jonsson@hh.se
IPB	José Jasnau Caeiro	j.caeiro@ipbeja.pt
MEN	Petra Coufalová	petra.coufalova@mendelu.cz
SeAMK	Anne-Maria Mäkelä	anne-maria.makela@seamk.fi
THD	Christian Schopf	christian.schopf@th-deg.de
TM	Kris Vancluysen	kris.vancluysen@thomasmore.be
UCN	Susanne Dau	sud@ucn.dk
VIKO	Alina Katunian	a.katunian@viko.lt

Appendix B — Application Form Template

Max. 3 pages for an application (see document)

Section	Description
Title of the cooperation	Brief and attractive (e.g., acronym)
Lead applicant (name, email, institution)	Researcher or research support staff
Partner institutions (name, email, institution)	Minimum 3 full HEROES partners involved.
What is the challenge, need or opportunity you want to address?	Brief description of the challenge, need, or opportunity, including objectives
Intended impact - on whom?	Brief description of the intended impact of the cooperation in the short-term and after one year (long-term), including target groups
Potential for future expansion	Brief description of potential next steps to sustain and further develop the cooperation.
Budget: feasibility and value for money	Assessment of the proportionality of the budget in relation to the planned activities. Co-funding amount (staff costs)

Appendix C— Budget Template

The budget only covers purchase costs. Co-funding is required for staff costs.



Co-funded by
the European Union

Budget Category	Description	Amount (EUR)
Travel, accommodation, subsistence		
Consumables		
Services for Meetings, Seminars		
Services for communication, promotion, dissemination		
Other		

Appendix D— Evaluation Template

Criterion	Score (1-10)	Comments
Alignment with Smart Regional Resilience		
Innovative character		
Expected impact (institution, region, society)		
Level and quality of (local) stakeholder involvement		
Potential for future expansion		
Feasibility and value for money		
Total		

Appendix E —Report Template

Section	Description
Title of the cooperation	Brief and attractive (e.g., acronym)
Lead applicant (name, email, institution)	Researcher or research support staff
Activities implemented	Brief description of the activities carried out
Impact on target groups	Brief description of the impact of the activities, including target groups
Activities for future expansion	Brief description of planned follow-up actions and commitments to further develop or sustain the cooperation.
<i>Supporting materials (to be attached)</i>	<i>Pictures, attendance lists, meeting minutes, dissemination and communication materials</i>



Appendix F— List of Associated Partners

Higher Education Institutions

1. **Université d’Artois (ART)** – Higher Education Institution – France – <https://www.univ-artois.fr>
2. **Hellenic Mediterranean University (HMU)** – Higher Education Institution – Greece – <https://www.hmu.gr>
3. **Ukrainian Catholic University (UCU)** – Higher Education Institution – Ukraine – <https://www.ucu.edu.ua>
4. **“Ismail Qemali” University Vloora (VLO)** – Higher Education Institution – Albania – <https://www.univloora.edu.al>
5. **Universum International College (UNI)** – Higher Education Institution – Kosovo – <https://www.universum-ks.org>

Local Stakeholders

1. **Associatie KU Leuven** – Higher Education Association – BE – <https://www.kuleuven.be>
2. **Atomos vzw** – Union of Student Associations – BE – <https://atomosvzw.be>
3. **City of Geel** – Local Authority – BE – <https://www.geel.be>
4. **KOGEKA** – Secondary School – BE – <https://www.kogeka.be>
5. **Province of Antwerp** – Regional Authority – BE – <https://www.provincieantwerpen.be>
6. **UNIZO** – SME Organisation – BE – <https://www.unizo.be>
7. **Voka Mechelen-Kempen** – Chamber of Commerce – BE – <https://www.voka.be>
8. **JCMM** – Non-profit Organisation – CZ – <https://www.jcmm.cz>
9. **JINAG** – Regional Development Agency – CZ – <https://www.jinag.eu>
10. **Czech Agroforestry Association** – Sectoral Organisation – CZ – <https://www.agroles.cz>
11. **City of Deggendorf** – Local Authority – DE – <https://www.deggendorf.de>
12. **Handwerkskammer Niederbayern-Oberpfalz** – Chamber of Crafts – DE – <https://www.hwkno.de>
13. **ITC Innovation Technology Campus** – Business Park / Incubator – DE – <https://www.itc-deggendorf.eu>
14. **Aalborg Handelsskole** – Secondary School – DK – <https://www.ah.dk>
15. **Aalborg Municipality** – Local Authority – DK – <https://www.aalborg.dk>
16. **Aalborg University** – University – DK – <https://www.aau.dk>



17. **Business Development Centre Northern Denmark** – Business Promotion Centre – DK – <https://www.erhvervshusnord.dk>
18. **Confederation of Danish Industries** – Employers’ Organisation – DK – <https://www.danskindustri.dk>
19. **Danish Life Science Cluster** – Cluster – DK – <https://www.lifesciencecluster.dk>
20. **DigitalLead** – Digital Transformation Cluster – DK – <https://digitallead.dk>
21. **Erhverv Norddanmark** – Chamber of Commerce – DK – <https://www.erhvervnord.dk>
22. **Hjørring Municipality** – Local Authority – DK – <https://www.hjoerring.dk>
23. **MADE – Manufacturing Academy of Denmark** – Cluster – DK – <https://www.made.dk>
24. **MARTEC** – Maritime & Polytechnic College – DK – <https://www.martec.dk>
25. **North Denmark Region** – Regional Authority – DK – <https://rn.dk>
26. **NorthDenmark EU-Office** – EU Liaison Office – DK – <https://www.euoffice.dk>
27. **NOVI Science Park** – Science Park – DK – <https://www.novi.dk>
28. **City of Seinäjoki** – Local Authority – FI – <https://www.seinajoki.fi>
29. **Into Seinäjoki** – Development Company – FI – <https://into.seinajoki.fi>
30. **Sedu** – Vocational Education & Training Centre – FI – <https://www.sedu.fi>
31. **South Ostrobothnia Chamber of Commerce** – Chamber of Commerce – FI – <https://www.epkk.fi>
32. **South Ostrobothnia University Association (Epsy)** – University Association – FI – <https://www.epky.fi>
33. **AgriFood Lithuania DIH** – Digital Innovation Hub / Cluster – LT – <https://www.agrifood.lt>
34. **Knowledge Economy Forum (KEF)** – NGO (Education & Innovation) – LT – <https://www.kef.lt>
35. **Vilnius “Juventa” Gymnasium** – Secondary School – LT – <https://www.juventa.lt>
36. **Vilnius Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Crafts** – Chamber of Commerce – LT – <https://www.cci.lt>
37. **Brainport Development** – Regional Development Agency – NL – <https://brainport.nl>
38. **Midpoint Brabant** – Regional Development Agency – NL – <https://midpointbrabant.nl>
39. **Summa College Eindhoven** – Secondary School – NL – <https://www.summacollege.nl>
40. **Alentejo Science and Technology Park (PACT)** – Science Park – PT – <https://www.pact.pt>
41. **Alentejo Regional Coordination and Development Commission** – Regional Development Commission – PT – <https://www.ccdr-a.gov.pt>
42. **ADRAL – Alentejo Regional Development Agency** – Regional Development Agency – PT – <https://www.adral.pt>



43. **CIMBAL – Lower Alentejo Intermunicipal Community** – Regional Development Agency – PT – <https://www.cimbal.pt>
44. **City of Beja** – Local Authority – PT – <https://www.cm-beja.pt>
45. **Nerbe/Aebal** – Regional Business Association – PT – <https://www.nerbe-aebal.pt>
46. **School Group No. 2 of Beja** – Secondary School Group – PT – (no website available)
47. **University of Évora** – Public University – PT – <https://www.uevora.pt>
48. **Campus Varberg** – Vocational Education & Training – SE – <https://www.campus.varberg.se>
49. **County Administrative Board of Halland** – Regional Authority – SE – <https://www.lansstyrelsen.se/halland>
50. **Halmstad Municipality** – Local Authority – SE – <https://www.halmstad.se>
51. **Region Halland** – Regional Authority – S – <https://www.regionhalland.se>
52. **Conference of Academies for Applied Studies in Serbia (CAASS)** – Higher Education Association – Serbia – <https://www.caass.rs>
53. **Erasmus Student Network (ESN)** – International Student Organisation – EU / International – <https://www.esn.org>
54. **EURASHE (EURA)** – European Higher Education Association – EU / International – <https://www.eurashe.eu>
55. **Lifelong Learning Platform (LLL)** – Umbrella Organisation for Education & Training – EU / International – <https://www.lllplatform.eu>

D. Other organisations (not formally associated)

1. **UAS4EUROPE (UAS)** – Higher Education Network – EU / Multinational – <https://www.uas4europe.eu>
2. **University of Nairobi (NAI)** – Higher Education Institution – Kenya – <https://www.uonbi.ac.ke>
3. **University of Education Winneba (WIN)** – Higher Education Institution – Ghana – <https://www.uew.edu.gh>
4. **City of Mykolaiv (MYK)** – Local Authority – Ukraine – <https://mkrada.gov.ua>



Authors

This manual was drafted as part of activities of Task 5.4 supervised by Thomas More University of Applied Sciences. The content was discussed iteratively by members of the WP5 research management/liaison group.



Co-funded by
the European Union

Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.



Co-funded by
the European Union