



# STAIRwAI

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) StairwAI Call for Adopters

**Open date for proposals: 23 February 2023 at 13:00 CET  
(Brussels Time)**

**Deadline: 25 April 2023 at 13:00 CEST (Brussels Time)**

Version 1



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## 1. What is StairwAI?

**StairwAI** ([\*Stairway to AI: Ease the Engagement of Low-Tech users to the AI-on-Demand platform through AI\*](#)) is an EU-funded project targeting low-tech users, which have to focus on **solving a specific challenge** using a set of AI tools and resources that are available as a service layer of the [AI4EU platform](#). This will be achieved through a new service layer enriching the functionalities of the on-demand platform.

## 2. Which organisations take part in the StairwAI project?

Project coordinator: Università di Bologna (UNIBO).

Partners: Istituto Nazionale di Fisica Nucleare, Bonseyes, EGI, Tilde, FundingBox, Huawei, Thales, Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya, University College Cork, Technische Universiteit Eindhoven.

## 3. What is the AloD (AI-on-Demand Platform) Platform and how is it connected to StairwAI?

The [AloD Platform](#) (AI-on-Demand Platform) brings the AI Ecosystem stakeholders and AI resources together in one dedicated place (research, products, solutions). The AloD Platform acts as the one-stop-shop for anyone looking for AI knowledge, technology, services, software, and experts.

In StairwAI, SMEs selected within the Open Call for Adopters will be invited to test services available on the AloD Platform, especially matchmaking with AI experts and AI resources that can support further project implementation, after the Feasibility Plan is in place.

## 4. Why should you apply?

- Selected companies will receive a maximum of €10.000 (fixed lump-sum) and will participate in the 2-month support program to prepare a Feasibility Plan for the adoption of AI.

Additionally:

- During the Support Program, you will be supported by Technical and Business Experts, who will guide you through the process of the Feasibility Plan preparation.
- You will get the Feasibility Plan, which is a reliable starting point in applying for additional funding for AI implementation.

- You will be ready for the AI implementation in cooperation with experts and resources identified by StairwAI (StairwAI will also suggest the list of AI experts and HW resource providers for project implementation, using the matchmaking tools developed by the StairwAI consortium).
- Your business will level up in terms of AI maturity.
- You will improve key processes in your company, thanks to which you will become more competitive.

## 5. Who can apply?

Low-tech SMEs (registered as a legal entity) established in:

- [The Member States of the European Union and its Overseas Countries and Territories \(OCT\) or](#)
- [Associated Countries to H2020,](#)
- The United Kingdom.

## 6. What is an SME?

An SME will be considered as such if it complies with [the European Commission's Recommendation 2003/361/EC](#). In summary, the criteria defining an SME are:

- Headcount in Annual Work Unit (AWU) less than 250;
- Annual turnover less or equal to €50 million OR annual balance sheet total less or equal to €43 million.

Note that the figures of partners and linked enterprises should also be considered as stated in the SME user guide. For detailed information check EU recommendation: [https://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/business-friendly-environment/sme-definition\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/business-friendly-environment/sme-definition_en).

## 7. How will we check your SME status?

Before signing the Sub-grant agreement, we are going to verify your SME status. More specifically, we will request you to provide the following information and documentation:

1. Legal existence and information about your company. Data needed to conclude the agreement: address of the registered office, legal representatives who will sign the agreement, VAT number (or tax id).  
To confirm those data you will be requested to provide the current extract from the registration document confirming your data - company register, official journal or equivalent.
2. Financial information. It includes the headcount (AWU), balance sheet total and the annual turnover for the last closed financial year.
3. Financial condition. Information about your capital, reserves, accumulated losses. Please bear in mind that we won't accept entities that are in difficulty in the meaning of art. 2.18 of the Commission Regulation No 651/2014.
4. We will check if your company is autonomous or belongs to a group of companies - it has a partner and or linked companies.
5. In the event you declare being non-autonomous - your company have partner/linked entities, you will be asked to indicate the partner/linked entities owner structures, information about your partner/linked company relations with other companies (partner/linked entities), staff headcount and financial data (annual turnover/balance sheet) for the last closed year.
6. Information about other H2020/Horizon Europe grants already received.
7. Bank account details - you will be requested to provide the Bank identification form - you will receive the template of the bank identification form during the formal check.

## 8. What is a low-tech SME?

For the purposes of StairwAI Open Call, the low-tech SMEs are considered to be companies (SMEs) with AI Readiness Index (AIRI) below or equal to 2.0 (classified as AI Unaware or AI Aware).

For StairwAI applicants the AI Readiness Index (AIRI) will be calculated based on methodology and survey developed by [AI SINGAPORE](#) and adjusted to the StairwAI project.

## 9. How are we going to measure your AI maturity (AIRI)?

We will measure your AIRI based on the 6 questions included in the application form.

In the section “AI Maturity of Applicant” you will find 6 single-choice questions with 4 possible answers to choose from.

The questions refer to the understanding of AI and related skills, AI business spanning, AI Governance, Infrastructure and Data.

We will score your answers to those questions from 1 to 4 and calculate the average score, which enables us to classify you as:

- AI Unaware (average score less than 1)
- AI Aware (average score from 1 to 2)
- AI Ready (average score above 2 to 2,5)
- AI Competent (average score above 2,5)

If your average score is below or equal to 2.0, we will consider you as a low-tech company.

If you are AI Unaware, don't worry! This is a project for you!

## 10. What are the challenge areas?

SMEs have to focus on **solving a specific challenge** using a set of AI tools and resources that are available as a service layer of the [AloD platform](#):

- **Challenge 1: Logistic and supply chains**
- **Challenge 2: Human resources**
- **Challenge 3: Management of data generated by the Internet of Things (IoT)**
- **Challenge 4: Manufacturing Industry**
- **Challenge 5: Environmental issues**
- **Challenge 6: Cyber Security**
- **Challenge 7: Health**
- **Challenge 8: Education**
- **Challenge 9: Energy**
- **Challenge 10: Art-driven solution and art production**
- **Challenge 11: Public services**
- **Challenge 12: Other**

Detailed description you will find in the [Guide for Applicants](#), Section 3.2.

## 11. Who is the ideal applicant for StairwAI?

Low-tech SMEs, as it was mentioned above.

You have a tool, service process or solution but it's not technologically advanced and you want to develop it on the basis of artificial intelligence and cooperate with European experts from this domain.

You shouldn't be advanced in AI but it's good if you precisely know your goal.

High TRL is not necessary. It is expected that the initial TRL<sup>1</sup> level will be TRL5 and beyond.

## 12. What is a TRL?

TRL - Technology Readiness Level- Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) are indicators of the maturity level of particular technologies. This measurement system provides a common understanding of technology status and addresses the entire innovation chain.

There are nine technology readiness levels; TRL 1 being the lowest and TRL 9 the highest. In our project, we refer to Annex G of the General Annexes to the Work Programme 2016/17 for a full description of TRLs.

It is expected that the initial TRL (Technology Readiness Level) will be TRL5 and beyond. In this project, for the application stage, we consider the TRL level of your solution without the AI component.

## 13. What happens if I do not submit my application within the deadline?

We do not accept applications after the deadline. We strongly encourage you not to wait until the last minute to submit your proposal. Failure of meeting the submission deadline for any reason, including extenuating circumstances, will result in the rejection of the proposal.

**Remember: the deadline to submit the project is on 25 April 2023 at 13:00 CEST (Brussels Time).**

## 14. How long does it take to fill in the application?

It shouldn't take more than 1-2 working days as an average. Take into account that specific character limits are set in each field of the online application form, so we encourage you to keep your proposal focused on the requested information, keeping in mind the StairwAI concept and the requirements gathered in the [Guide for Applicants](#) for this call. We also recommend you to

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<sup>1</sup>



start the submission process quite in advance before the deadline in order to avoid last-minute problems.

## 15. Can a company submit two project ideas?

No. If more than one proposal submitted by the same applicant is identified, only the last proposal which has been submitted will be evaluated (most recent in relation to deadline).

## 16. Can I apply if I have received FSTP grants from other projects before?

Yes, it is possible to apply to other open calls. An important point that you should pay attention to if you are selected (funded) for multiple EU projects is **the double funding rule**. That means that you have to be able to confirm that funding received from one EU project will not cover the same costs/tasks which were already funded by other EU projects. Please note that SMEs engaged in other EU funded acceleration/support programmes will have to prove that they have enough resources to be able to implement and complete StairwAI support program tasks (in case of being selected).

## 17. Can I receive support in the 3rd OC if I was a beneficiary of the 1st or 2nd OC?

No, if you have already been awarded in the 1st or 2nd StairwAI Support Program you are not eligible to receive any kind of support (financial and non-financial) from other StairwAI open calls, since the limits of funding received is a maximum of 60 000 EUR per company.

## 18. Are applicants required to include the budget plan in the application?

Details about the budget are not required at the application stage. The detailed budget planned for execution will be requested from selected SMEs, at the beginning of the Support Programme in Individual Mentoring Plan.

## 19. Will I be able to modify my proposal after submission?

Yes, after you submit your application, you can EDIT it as many times as you wish **until the deadline**.

## 20. What are the selection criteria?

Each proposal will be evaluated by external evaluators with 3 main awarding criteria Excellence, Impact and Implementation. Detailed description you will find in the [Guide for Applicants](#), Section 4.3

## 21. What type of support is available for preparing the proposal?

The '[Guide for Applicants](#)' is the main reference document. It provides detailed information about the requirements of the evaluation and selection process, and the Support Program offered by StairwAI. If you encounter any technical problems while filling in the application form, contact [info.stairwai@fundingbox.com](mailto:info.stairwai@fundingbox.com) and we will do our best to help you.

## 22. How to write a proposal that convinces evaluators?

Make sure you do not leave any information out of your proposal. Be specific and provide precise answers to the questions in the application form. You can find all the information you need in the [Guide for Applicants](#).

## 23. Who are the external evaluators?

Evaluators are external, independent experts with proven experience in AI and the particular challenges to be evaluated. The panel of external experts is selected and invited by the StairwAI consortium. Each evaluator signs a code of conduct and confidentiality clause before they start the evaluation of the proposals.

## 24. What are the different evaluation phases and the expected schedule?

The table below presents the indicative dates in which each of the evaluation phases will end and the number of expected applicants that would go through to the next phase.

Phase	Time	Approximate Date	Number of applicants passing to the Next Phase
Eligibility Check & Pre-Scoring	3 days	26/04/2023 – 28/04/2023	Approx. 60
External Evaluation	Approx. 4 weeks	02/05/2023 – 31/05/2023	Up to 60
Consensus Meeting	1 day	Mid-June	Up to 32
Finalist Communication	1 day	1 week after Consensus Day	Up to 32
Legal Check (including SME status check)	Approx. 4 weeks	by mid July 2023	Up to 32

**Table 1. Phases of selection**

## 25. What are the pre-scoring criteria?

- Dedication to the project (12,5% weight / up to 10 points),
- Team skills (12,5% weight / up to 10 points),
- Proved experience in the target market (12,5% weight / up to 10 points),
- Progress or traction during last 3 years (12,5% weight / up to 10 points),
- Scalability of the solution (12,5% weight / up to 10 points),
- Market opportunity (12,5% weight / up to 10 points),
- TRL level of your solution (12,5% weight / up to 10 points),
- Technology Level of your business (12,5% weight / up to 10 points).

## 26. What is a conflict of interest?

Conflict of interest may occur, if there are capital or personal connections between two or more entities (Applicant, Consortium partner or any person involved in the selection process), in particular, it should be understood as:

- any ownership relations - ownership of shares, financial links and economic connections - like joint venture, holding, joint participation, silent partner. E.g. Applicant's entity owns shares in the Consortium partner company or the Consortium partner company owns shares in the Applicant's company (it also refers to the Applicant's partners/linked enterprises). As economic connection we can understand exclusive licences, sale agreements if they concern product or solution covered by your application etc;
- family and personal relationships, in particular: marriage, kinship, a relationship of affinity to the second degree in a straight line or lateral line, adoption, custody or guardianship or actual life and other close personal ties binding the Applicant and Consortium partner or any person involved in the selection process (it refers also to employees, shareholders, members of the management body, members of the board, managers, subcontractors etc.) – e.g. person representing the Consortium partner company has family/personal ties with anyone representing the Applicant company;
- the existence of material, especially financial relationships (such as the receipt by a person involved in the selection process from Applicant any significant gifts, donations, future contracts or employment, etc;
- relationships based on employment, cooperation or existing civil contract between the Consortium partners and people involved in the Applicant's structure, including managerial or supervisory functions, position in managing or supervising bodies. E.g. Director of the Consortium partner is involved in the management bodies of an Applicant company; the Applicant's employees involved in the Project are employed or contracted by the Consortium partner company etc;
- remaining in a legal or factual relationship that may give rise to justified doubts as to the impartiality of the people involved in the selection process (expert/evaluator/employee/member of the management bodies of any of the Consortium partners etc).

The reasons set forth above may result in a conflict of interest if they occur at the time of an action or have occurred in the past (during the last 2 years before the action starts). Time limits do not apply to family and personal relationships.

Remember that the concept of conflict of interest should be understood widely, so if you have any doubts about the conflict of Interest please consult it with our team.

All cases of conflict of interest will be assessed on a case by case basis.

## 27. Can project partners help me with proposal writing?

No, project partners engaged in the StairwAI consortium cannot be involved in the writing of applications.

## 28. What are the payment conditions?

There will be only one payment of the lump-sum grant at the end of the support programme, after successful Milestone Review. Your performance will be evaluated and approved by the Mentoring Committee and validated by the Selection Committee during the Milestone Review. You will find all the necessary information in the [Guide for Applicants](#), section 5 “Our Support Programme and Payment Arrangements”.

## 29. What is the ethical check?

Remember that all finalists will be carefully verified by the ‘Ethics Experts’, to see if there are any ethical issues raised in the proposal. If so, an ‘Ethics Summary Report’ will be produced and ‘Ethics Committee’ will be established to supervise and monitor the ethical concerns during the project’s implementation.

During the ethical check, we encourage you to follow the [Ethics Guidelines for Trustworthy AI](#) and ALTAI (Assessment List for Trustworthy Artificial Intelligence) tool.

## 30. What is ALTAI

The Assessment List for Trustworthy Artificial Intelligence (ALTAI), is a list, and also a practical tool which intends to facilitate that businesses and organisations may self-assess the trustworthiness of the AI systems that they are developing.

The AI HLEG (High-Level Expert Group on AI) was appointed by the European Commission to produce the [Ethics Guidelines for Trustworthy AI](#), which intends to go towards developing AI

with a human-centric approach. The concept of trustworthiness applied to AI was proposed by this Expert Group, and it revolves around seven key requirements:

- Human Agency and Oversight;
- Technical Robustness and Safety;
- Privacy and Data Governance;
- Transparency;
- Diversity, Non-discrimination and Fairness;
- Environmental and Societal well-being; and
- Accountability.

ALTAI comes as a way to make the Ethics Guidelines into a practical tool, making it more accessible for AI developers and deployers. This allows those who wish to implement the requirements identified by the AI HLEG to be autonomous in their process through the use of a [list \(PDF\)](#) or a [web based tool](#).

## 31. What is the payment schedule?

The selected grantees will receive up to €10,000 at the end of the support programme (of duration of up to 2 months), after the Milestone Review.

## 32. What is a lump sum?

The lump sum is a simplified method of settling expenses in projects financed from Horizon 2020 funds. It means that you are not required to present strictly defined accounting documents to prove the cost incurred (e.g. invoices), but you are obliged to demonstrate the implementation of the project in line with the set up milestones for it. Simply speaking, it means that we will assess your progress and quality of your work, during the Final Review, not your accountancy. The milestones (objectives and results) must be defined in the application form and (if necessary) elaborated before signing the Sub Grant Agreement. The lump sum does not release you from the obligation to collect documentation to confirm the costs under fiscal regulation.

### 33. What is the % of co-financing of project costs by StairwAI?

StairwAI is distributing financial support in the form of a lump sum. The lump sum may cover up to 100% (up to € 10 000) of your costs related to the project implementation and included in the Individual Mentoring Plan (elaborated at the beginning of the Support Program). So, in case your costs during the project are not higher than € 10 000, the lump sum will cover 100 % of your costs related to the project implementation.

### 34. What services does StairwAI offer in the Support Program?

During the project, you will be supported by:

- **Technical Mentor,**
- **Business Mentor,**
- **StairwAI services (matchmaking tools developed by StairwAI consortium) to help you find the necessary resources for the AI adoption (experts in AI, HW resources),**
- **AI resources and tools available on the AI4EU Platform (AI on Demand Platform).**

### 35. How will StairwAI monitor the progress of the SMEs during the project?

The 'Mentoring Committee' will evaluate the performance of selected SMEs at the Milestone Review (established when a payment is due), according to the criteria established at the beginning of the Support Program in the Individual Mentoring Plan.

Each criterion will be scored from 0 to 10 and the weight of each one of these criteria, in the final score, will be as follow:

- Deliverable quality (30%).
- Technical performance indicators (30%).
- Business performance indicators (30%).
- Deadline Compliance (10%).

According to this final score, beneficiaries over the threshold (7 points) will successfully receive the grant payment. Beneficiaries under the threshold, the beneficiaries who haven't reached the threshold (7 points) will be proposed, by the 'Mentoring Committee', as candidates to leave the Program. And, if this decision is finally validated by the 'Selection Committee', they will have to leave the Program and won't receive the grant payment.

### 36. What is the Individual Mentoring Plan?

The Individual Mentoring Plan is a document stating the KPIs and deliverables that should be achieved by the SME during the Support Program duration and the resources along with the appropriate budget committed to the project.

### 37. Is any accountability required on the way the funds have been used, e. g. invoices and other financial documents? Are there any specific restrictions on how the funds are utilised?

The FSTP beneficiaries will receive a fixed lump sum of up to € 10 000.

The lump sum is a simplified method that means that the FSTP recipient is not required to present accounting documents like invoices, timesheets, etc, to prove that the cost was actually incurred. However, StairwAI will assess your progress and quality of your work during Interim Reviews, not your accountancy. In this sense, we will ask you to demonstrate the implementation of the project in line with the milestones set. In any case, the lump sum methodology does not release you from the obligation to collect documentation to confirm the costs under fiscal regulations. Please bear in mind that by participating in the StairwAI support programme, receiving the grant and signing the Sub-grant Agreement you will also be responsible towards the competent tax authorities, and the EC audit bodies such as the European Court of Auditors (ECA) and the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF).

### 38. Where can I find help with my application?

If you have extra questions regarding our Open Call process you can send us a message to [info.stairwai@fundingbox.com](mailto:info.stairwai@fundingbox.com)

In case of any technical issues or problems, please include the following information in your message:

- your username, telephone number and your email address;
- details of the specific problem (error messages you encountered, bugs descriptions, i.e. if a dropdown list isn't working, etc.); and
- screenshots of the problem.