

# **WORTH II**

## **Call for Expressions of Interest**

### **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)**

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# 1. Introduction

The present document provides a list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and answers related to the WORTH Partnership Project Open Call. The list of questions is preliminary and the document will be continuously updated throughout the project implementation.

To ask a question, please contact us at [helpdesk@worthproject.eu](mailto:helpdesk@worthproject.eu)

## 2. General Questions

### What is WORTH Partnership Project?

WORTH Partnership Project is a European project, precisely an Innovation Action, supported by the European Commission. The general objective of the call is to strengthen the competitiveness of SMEs in fashion and lifestyle industries and increase their innovation capacities through cross-sectorial, pan-European collaborations between SMEs, designers, and technology providers to foster the integration of creativity, design, and new technologies in SMEs to obtain high added-value products, processes and services.

## 3. Questions related to the Call

### What is the call for proposals?

WORTH Partnership Project is launching a Call for proposals to select partnerships operating in lifestyle projects with the next objectives:

- Enhance competitiveness and new designs and creations
- Integrate technologies in SMEs
- Foster new, innovative or high-added value products, processes or services developed in collaboration.

### Who can apply?

The WORTH Partnership Project open call targets any SME, self-employed professional or other entities (not large companies) that are willing to address solutions for the participating industry sectors:

- Textile/fashion
- Footwear
- Leather/fur
- Furniture/home decoration/interior design/architecture
- Jewellery
- Accessories

## How to apply?

The applicants are invited to apply by submitting a complete proposal following the application form on the submission platform: <https://worth.ems-carsa.com/>. The template for the proposal is featured on the submission platform. A model template is available on the [helpdesk area](#) of the website. Head to the section [“apply now”](#).

## When is the deadline?

The second call application deadline is 12<sup>th</sup> December 2023 at 17:00 h (CET).

## How many projects does the initiative expect to fund?

WORTH will fund a total of 202 projects throughout the project. even though it is expected to have more or less the same number of partnerships per call for a more functional, efficient and balanced workload and resources allocation, the number of selected partnerships per call will depend on the quality of the project applications submitted.

135 projects were already selected in the first and second calls. 67 more projects will be selected in the third call for proposals.

## Who is an “applicant”?

An applicant is a registered user requesting the eligibility check. To pass the eligibility check, the applicant is required to enter the information into the registration form.

## Who is a “potential partner”?

Potential partners are applicants that have passed the eligibility check and can firstly work on the partnership formation and then, preparation of the partnership project proposal.

## What is a WORTH partnership?

A team formed of two or three partners from at least two different participating countries and working in one of the eligible industry sectors. At least two of the following target groups must be involved in the project: designers, SME manufacturers, crafters, tech developers/owners.

## Can an applicant apply on his/her own?

No. Partnerships must be formed of at least 2, maximum 3 members.

## What is the difference between legal status, business activity and the role played in the partnership?

The legal status is the legal identity by which a person, entity or company is recognised. At this point, the applicant will have to choose between SME, self-employed or others (referring to Private for-profit organisations, private for non-profit organisations, universities, design labs, research organisations).

The business activity refers to the main activity of the applicant related to the purpose of making a profit. At this point, the applicant will have to choose among the next business activities:

- Design/creative
- Manufacturing/craftsmanship
- Technology development/technology supplier

The role played in the partnership states the role of the applicant played in the project itself. The applicants may need to choose among the next options:

- Design/creative
- Manufacturing/craftsmanship
- Technology development/technology supplier

## Can two applicants who have the same business activity submit an application?

It depends. If two applicants have stated that their business activity is the same but they play different roles in the project, an application may be submitted. But if both applicants play the same role in the project, then the project is not admissible.

Applicants with the same business activity will have to demonstrate clearly that they play a different role in the project and that they have the resources and capability to play the role.

## What is the duration of the projects?

The partnership projects must have a 10-month duration.

## What type of design solutions are considered relevant for the 3<sup>rd</sup> open call for expressions of interest?

WORTH assess positively design solutions that contribute in an innovative and creative way to the objectives of the call, such as

- Circular Economy (including green transition, energy efficiency, reducing carbon footprint, sustainable production and consumption)
- Digital Manufacturing
- High-added value solutions (including disruptive approaches and digitised value chains)
- High-performance and innovative materials
- Reinventing craftsmanship
- Social Innovation (including European cultural heritage preservation for social cohesion and well-being)

## 4. Questions related to the eligibility of applicants, partners and partnerships

### What are the eligibility criteria?

In order to be eligible, the partners (lead applicants and partners) must:

- a. be established in one of the eligible countries, i.e.: (*Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden*), **COSME associated countries** (*Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine*) or *United Kingdom*.
- b. be legal entities forming a consortium, including:
  - SME under the [EU definition](#) (Staff headcount <250 and either Turnover<= €50M or Balance sheet total <=€43M). SME companies must be legally established for at least six months prior to the signature of the partnership agreement
  - self-employed professionals. They must be legally established according to the laws of each participating country, as of the signature of the grant agreement, and at least during the whole duration of their project implementation
  - private non-for-profit organisations
  - private for-profit organisations
  - other entities, such as: universities, research organisations, design labs etc if justified as relevant to the project
- c. be active in any of the **eligible lifestyle industry sectors**: *textile/fashion, footwear, leather/fur, furniture/home decoration/interior design/architecture, jewellery, and accessories*. and have any of the following **business activities**: *design, manufacturing/craftsmanship, technology development*
- d. Partners must not be in process of receivership or bankruptcy.

### Which countries are eligible? Is the United Kingdom eligible?

Eligible countries are the EU-27 member states and COSME-associated countries:

Austria, Albania, Armenia, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, North Macedonia, Kosovo, Turkey, Ukraine.

Yes, the United Kingdom is an eligible country in this third call for expressions of interest.

### What makes a company an SME?

As the EU definition explains, an SME is a company that has less than 250 Staff headcounts and either Turnover  $\leq$  €50M or Balance sheet total  $\leq$  €43M

## Which industry sectors are eligible?

Sectors of lifestyle industries including textile, footwear, leather, fur, furniture, home decoration, interior design, architecture, jewellery, and accessories.

## Can I work with a partner from my same country

Partnerships must be transnational, that means partners must be established in two different countries, no matter their nationality.

# 5. Questions related to the application process

## What documents must I complete to successfully submit my project proposal?

Fillable pdf templates are available to be downloaded by applicants. The application consists in submitting the following application items:

- a) The project proposal form (guidelines are available in the [helpdesk area](#)).
- b) A project dossier (as an annex including sketches, drawings or moodboards and a preliminary business plan - 3 pages maximum all together in pdf).
- c) The applicants' portfolio
- d) Video story (guidelines available in the [helpdesk area](#)).

## What is the language that the proposal should be submitted in?

Proposals must be submitted in ENGLISH.

## Can I send all requested information by email, and consider it successfully received?

No, all information must be entered into the respective sections of the partnership project proposal form and submitted through the [EMS Platform](#).

## Can I submit the partnership project proposal without a partner?

No, the partnership project proposal must be submitted as a partnership by the lead partner and completed in full conformity. Individual applications will automatically be rejected.

## Is the submission of a video explaining the project optional or compulsory?

It is compulsory to present your idea in a video (3-min maximum). Note that only one video is required for each project proposal. The video must address the next questions:

- Why should WORTH support your project?
- How will the intervention of WORTH impact on your business/career (e.g. in terms of turnover, employment, internationalisation, access to new markets, etc.)?
- How does this project idea fit in your business strategy or career? How will this benefit you? At partnership level and at individual level
- Tell us the story behind the project idea. What inspired you?
- How well is the proposed partnership contributing to the objectives of the call, such as
  - *Circular Economy (including green transition, energy efficiency, reducing carbon footprint, sustainable production and consumption)*
  - *Digital Manufacturing*
  - *High-added value solutions (including disruptive approaches and digitised value chains)*
  - *High-performance and innovative materials*
  - *Reinventing craftsmanship*
  - *Social Innovation (including European cultural heritage preservation for social cohesion and well-being)*

## What happens if my video exceeds the maximum size of 20 Mb?

The video cannot be larger than 20 MB. In case of exceeding the maximum size, you may also upload the video on YouTube or Vimeo and upload to the EMS platform a pdf file with the link inserted.

## How can WORTH guarantee that any of our ideas are not “stolen” by any of the players, directly or indirectly involved in the project?

Disclaimers regarding IPRs protection are present on the website (homepage and throughout the different sections of the application process: registration, eligibility form, the gallery and the partnership project proposal). Moreover, confidentiality terms are ruled in:

- Agreements between partnership members.
- Agreements between the partnership and the consortium.
- Agreements between the WORTH consortium and the key players involved such as the ambassadors, steering board, and mentors.

An idea cannot be protected in general. Only the implementation of a certain idea can be protected and give rise to an exclusive right when original and innovative.

WORTH Partnership Project aims to support projects when finalised to create a prototype.

Moreover, access to projects' information is restricted to registered and eligible users only and when registering the user acknowledge such confidentiality agreements and clearly accept that each IPR belongs to the entitled party.

In general, the WORTH Partnership Project can be considered as a community of inventors or an R&D Community, so that all the exchanges of information are confidential and protected from possible disclosure until the invention is fully protected by IPRs.



Finally, one of the many areas of support provided by WORTH Partnership Project is namely to impart consultancy and guidance to the selected partnerships on IPRs organisation.

Also, there will be some sessions on IPR management and advice when rolling out the coaching program provided by WORTH.

For further inquiries on this, eligible applicants could reach out to the consortium via email at [privacy@worthproject.eu](mailto:privacy@worthproject.eu).

## Can an S.A. company participate as a member of a partnership?

Yes. An SME legally established under the national laws and under the EU definition can participate regardless the type of corporation and as long as they are eligible according to the eligible legal status: self-employed, micro size enterprise, small size enterprise, medium size enterprise, private for-profit organisation, private non-profit organisation, universities, a research organisation.

## Can an unsuccessful partnership resubmit a project proposal in the next call for application?

Yes. Unsuccessful projects are invited to continue refining and improving either the previous or a new project idea.

All the partnerships will receive evaluation feedback with helpful remarks and final conclusions from the steering board with the aim of providing guidance.

WORTH really hopes that unsuccessful projects do not discourage from applying to the second or third call for applications with an improved project proposal.

## Where can I find the relevant information about the open call and the application process?

Head to the [helpdesk area](#) on the project website and go thoroughly through the helpdesk documents. For further enquiries, contact us at [helpdesk@worthproject.eu](mailto:helpdesk@worthproject.eu)

## 6. Questions related to administrative issues

### Can you let us know about the administrative duties beforehand, as we do not want to lose time applying to a project that we may not be able to deliver afterwards?

Selected Partnerships will become WORTH beneficiaries.

Contracts with beneficiaries will be managed by the Consortium. The administrative tasks for the beneficiaries, including activity reporting obligations and related documents will be provided during the partnership agreements formalisation.

The lead partner of the selected partnerships will be requested to sign a Grant Agreement with the consortium leader (AITEK). The main objective of this agreement is to validate

financial and technical operational capacity from the partners and to establish rules for receiving support from the WORTH project.

Partnerships will have to submit proof of:

- Legal existence: Legal Entity Form accompanied with the supporting documents (registration, tax certificates). Legal entity form can be found here.
- Bank Account information: Financial Identification Form. Financial Identification form can be found here.
- Founders IDs
- Existence of a Consortium Agreement between the participants (Partnership Agreement)

## What is the funding scheme?

The following payment scheme will apply:

- The first 30% will be 30 days after the invoice submission resulting from the formalisation of the partnership and grant agreements.
- Other 40% will be paid after the approval of the mid-term report, 30 days after issuing the second invoice.
- The last 30% will be effective after approval of the final report (20%) and corresponding work validation by the consortium and 30 days after issuing the third invoice; and the remaining 10% after the successful attendance to the exhibitions/international design events.
- The amount will be shared between the partners following the breakdown agreed by the partnership members.

## 7. Questions related to the evaluation process

### Who evaluates the project proposals?

Project proposals are evaluated by a Steering Board of renowned experts with expertise in the lifestyle industries.

### Will my proposal be selected if this is scored above the threshold?

Project proposals above the threshold (60 points out of 100) will not be automatically selected. Highest scores will be ranked within a shortlist of finalist projects considering a balanced coverage per the industry sectors. The final selection will follow the final assessment interview to finalist projects.

### What is the next step after entering the shortlist of finalist projects?

**A programme of final assessment interviews** will be organised per call.

During the final assessment interviews, each finalist partnership will present their ideas and sketches to the Steering Board. Finalists will also have the occasion to address the concerns pointed out by the Steering Board. The finalists will benefit from getting feedback and advice on their proposals/ideas.

In case the interviews are organised online, professional virtual platforms such as Professional Zoom or Microsoft Teams will be used to allow virtual meeting rooms and simultaneous connections for all the attendees.

In case the interviews take place on-site, **finalists will also be allowed to participate remotely, which will not jeopardise their chances to be selected.**

As part of the accompanying process implemented throughout the evaluation process, all the finalist partnerships invited to attend the validation session will be provided with the evaluation remarks and feedback as well as the guidelines to successfully address any shortcoming pointed out by the Steering Board in the previous evaluation phase.

The final assessment interview is intended to identify any critical shortcoming that cannot be addressed through the mentoring programme. The decision on the lump sum allocated to each project will be made by the SB at the end of the interview.

The output of the final assessment interviews will be the list of projects recommended to receive support. The list will also include the lump sum allocation recommendation for each project. The results will be presented to the Contracting Authority EISMEA-DG GROW in a final selection and validation session, who will validate and approve the decision of the Steering Board.

The Contracting Authority will be involved as observers throughout the end-to-end evaluation process.

All admissible project proposals will be notified of the evaluation outcomes via email. The notification letter will include the evaluation summary report. The evaluation will also be available on the private section “My area” of the applicant on EMS platform.

The process and the meetings/exchanges between the Steering Board members will also be documented.

## Who pays the travel expenses of the on-site validation session?

In case the final assessment interviews take place on-site, finalist projects will cover the expenses. If the project is ultimately selected, this will be covered by the grant. If due to specific unforeseeable and unavoidable circumstances on-site sessions cannot be organised, finalists can also participate remotely, which will not jeopardise their chances to be selected.

The on-site participation in the validation session in Brussels is a great occasion to network and connect with other creatives and members of the WORTH community.

## Can a project be unsuccessful after the final assessment interview?

Yes, the evaluation process consists of 2 stages:

- Evaluation of the drafted project proposal.

- Assessment interviews with the Steering Board

Once the programme of assessment interviews is over, the Steering Board will attend the final selection and validation session with the European Commission (in Brussels) to decide on the final list of selected projects. The European Commission will approve and validate the list of selected projects recommended by the Steering Board together with the allocation of the lump sums to the projects.

The **final list of selected partnerships** will be provided to the Contracting Authority for the final approval.

## 8. Other Questions

### How in-depth must the answers on the Partnership Project Proposal be?

All the information provided through the partnership project proposal should be accurate, clear and summarised. The maximum characters for each field in the Partnership Project Proposal form is set depending on the expected relevance of the question in terms of the points allocated in the scoring framework.