



# EmpoWomen Open Call #1

## Guidelines for Applicants

Prepared by: SPLORO

OPENING: 08 of January 2024

CLOSING: 08 of March 2024 at 17:00 CET

Project Website: [www.empowomen.eu](http://www.empowomen.eu)

Open Call platform: [https://bit.ly/EmpoWomen\\_OC1](https://bit.ly/EmpoWomen_OC1)

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## List of Acronyms

CA	Consortium Agreement
OC	Open Call
FSTP	Financial Support for Third Parties
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprise
VAT	Value Added Tax
ASA	Advance Subscription for Shares
SAFE	Simple Agreement for Future Equity



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## 1. Introduction

The purpose of this document, "**Guidelines for Applicants**," is to provide clear and concise instructions to applicants submitting proposals for the first open call of the EmpoWomen project (**OC#1**), **which opens on January 8, 2024, and closes on March 8, 2024**, coinciding with **International Women's Day**. The document contains information that is specific to this deadline, including eligibility criteria, evaluation procedures, and submission requirements, which have been carefully curated to ensure clarity and accuracy. **It is important to note that the information presented in this document may not apply to the next call launched by the EmpoWomen project.** (The next call, which will be in December 2024, will have its own guidelines). Therefore, it is essential that all applicants thoroughly read and comprehend this document to ensure that their proposals meet the specific requirements outlined for the OC#1.

**The Guidelines for Applicants document aims to assist potential applicants for the EmpoWomen OC#1.** It is provided for information purposes only and is not intended to replace **consultation of the Sub-Grant Agreement template (Annex 3)**, where it is defined the framework of rights and obligations of the Contracting Parties for the development of the financed project. The Sub-Grant Agreement will be signed by the EmpoWomen coordinator, on behalf of the entire consortium, and each beneficiary of this open call.

### 1.1 About EmpoWomen project.

EmpoWomen funded by the European Union through its Horizon Europe Research and Innovation programme, seeks to overcome the obstacles faced by women in the field of R&D&I to improve equality in deep tech entrepreneurship.

Despite consistent growth in the business world, women remain substantially underrepresented as entrepreneurs, particularly in Europe. In the deep tech sector, currently valued at 700 billion EUR, women account for only 10% of patent applications, and less than 15% of startups are founded or co-founded by women.

EmpoWomen offers a unique programme for scaling up women-led companies with the objective to create an exclusive support programme for female founders and entrepreneurs leading deep tech startups from widening-area countries to grow into tomorrow's female tech leaders and put women at the forefront of deep tech in the world.

The initiative EmpoWomen is a 2-year programme (2024-2025) which consists of a unique acceleration and mentoring programme and includes non-repayable funding totaling 1,125 M EUR, prizes and services to 25 women-led deep-tech companies selected through a competitive process from European emerging markets and the outermost regions and associated EU countries.



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Sploro, TechUkraine, Business Angels Europe (BAE) and Startup Wise Guys (SWG), all together with 8 startup associations from the widening area will run this innovative programme which will be the first to support deep tech women-led companies. The selected women-led businesses will each have access to a 6-month programme consisting of a dedicated acceleration and investment readiness support service by SWG, webinars and events, together with specialist training and mentoring from Business Angels, combined with Demo days and direct connections with both Angel Investors and Venture capitals (VCs), offering the potential to access investment.

## 1.2 Objectives and ambition

The purpose of EmpoWomen\_OC#1 is to actively involve women-led deep tech early-stage startups in the widening areas. This call seeks to identify and choose promising startups to participate in a customized acceleration programme. The overarching goal is to offer support that nurtures the development and investment potential of these startups, with the ultimate aim of cultivating them into leading female figures in deep tech innovation within Europe.



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## 2. Relevant dates

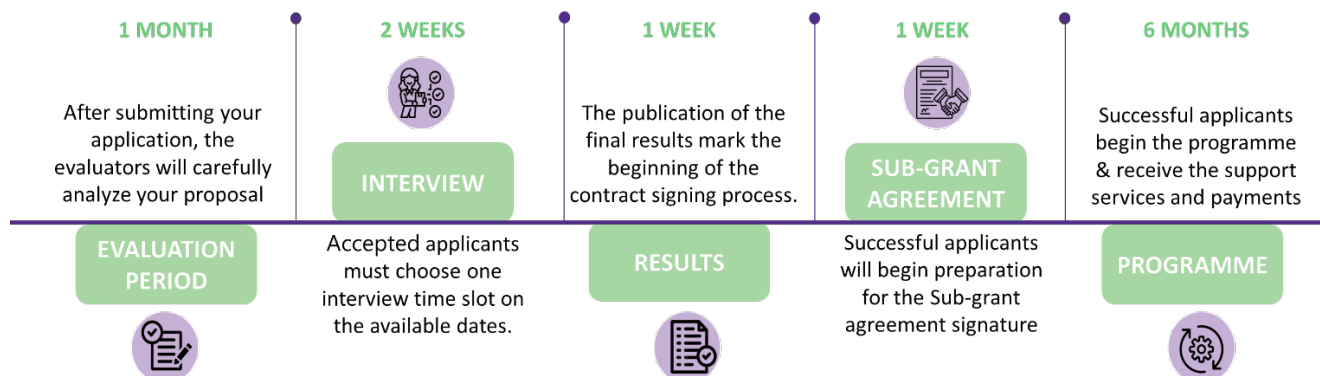


Figure 1. Lifecycle of a funded proposal

### 2.1 Applications

Opening: **08.01.2024**

Deadline for submission: **08.03.2024, 17:00h CET**

### 2.2 Evaluation

- **Evaluation period:** Indicatively period to evaluate applicants. **11.03.2024 to 05.04.2024**
- **Interviews:** only the applicants who passed the evaluation stage will be interviewed. Applicants will be called for one interview time slot among the following dates: **08.04.2024 to 12.04.2024 and 15.04.2024 to 19.04.2024**. Rejecting or failing to attend the interview will disqualify the applicant without further due.
- **Results:** The publication of the evaluation's final results will be around **25.04.24**, marking the beginning of the contract signing process and the inclusion of successful candidates into the programme. There will not be any prior disclosure of information about the evaluation process before that date.
- **Legal validation and Sub-grant agreement preparation:** starting from **25.04.2024 to 03.05.2024**. Legal validation is applied exclusively to successful applicants and involves the submission of various documents (**see Section 5.4**) to ensure compliance with the requirements of the EmpoWomen programme. Successful applicants will begin preparation for the Sub-grant agreement signature until **03.05.2024**.



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## 2.3 Acceleration Programme

- **Onboarding:** Starting from **06.05.2024**, the selected teams will commence identifying the most suitable range of services for their training during the programme.

To learn more details about the acceleration program, you can refer to **Section 6** of this document.



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## 3. Rules and conditions

### 3.1 Eligible Beneficiaries

EmpoWomen primarily focuses on women-led deep tech early-stage startups in Widening Areas. In this section, specific criteria and conditions are outlined, establishing eligibility for potential beneficiaries. EmpoWomen offers a personalized programme that provides you with access to high-level acceleration services, equity-free financing, and vouchers for business support services.

To be eligible as an applicant at EmpoWomen, it is essential to understand certain key criteria that define the profile of a qualified beneficiary. Here are the key definitions that guide the selection of beneficiaries:

1. **Startup:** a 'start-up' should be understood as an SME, according to the EU definition of SMEs, in the early stage of its life cycle, including those that are created as spin-offs from university research activities, which aims to find innovative solutions and scalable business models, and which is autonomous within the meaning of [Article 2 and 3 of the Annex to Commission Recommendation 2003/361/EC](#).
2. **Early-stage startup:** For the purpose of the project, we would consider the following criteria to define an early-stage start-up:
  - companies that have been established and operating for not more than 6 years counting backwards from submission date and,
  - companies that have raised limited funding (up to 1 M EUR).
3. **Women Leadership Criterion:** The startup's leadership must have a substantial representation of women, and it is crucial that at least one woman assumes a key role, whether as a co-founder, a member of the core management team, or serving on the board of directors. While acknowledging the inclusion of women on the board, it is important to highlight that this criterion alone may not fulfill the requirement. Board members should not only be representatives from incubators, accelerators, or venture capital firms but must also demonstrate a significant connection to the project or the founding team.
4. **Female Founder or Co-founder Requirement:** The project aims to support women in their diverse forms, encompassing cisgender and transgender women legally recognized as such. The eligibility for the founding or co-founding requirement is met if the woman is legally acknowledged as the founder or co-founder of the company in a Widening Area region. Applicants are expected to provide evidence of their status as founders or co-founders.

**Note: women leadership criterion as well as female founder or co-founder requirement are both compulsory**

5. **Deep tech:** The startup must be engaged in the development of advanced and disruptive technologies. According to the EU regulation: "Deep tech is technology that is based on



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cutting-edge scientific advances and discoveries and is characterised by the need to stay at the technological forefront by constant interaction with new ideas and results from the lab. Deep tech innovation aims to provide concrete solutions to our societal problems by finding its source in a deep interaction with the most recent scientific and technological advances and by seeking to produce a profound impact in the targeted application technologies.”<sup>1</sup>

### Deep Tech Technologies

In the context of OC#1 of the EmpoWomen project, relevance is given to various deep tech technologies where women play a fundamental role. These deep tech technologies, carefully selected for the call, span from quantum computing to emerging technologies such as augmented reality and artificial intelligence.

#### The call will encompass the following deep tech technologies:

- **Advanced Computing /Quantum Computing:** Advanced Computing involves the use of cutting-edge technologies to perform complex computations at high speeds, while Quantum Computing leverages principles of quantum mechanics to process information using quantum bits (qubits), potentially revolutionizing computing capabilities beyond classical limitations.
- **Advanced Manufacturing:** The technologies in this area are diverse and include, but are not limited to, the following categories. There are also overlaps with other technologies listed separately, including Robotics, AI/ML; VR/AR; 5G; Digital Twins; Robotics; Edge Computing.
- **Advanced Materials:** The research, development, engineering and production of advanced materials with engineered properties, including ceramics, high value-added metals, electronic materials, composites, polymers, and biomaterials.
- **Aerospace, Automotive and Remote Sensing:** This technological area focusses on new methods of transport and mobility and space technology as well as the sensing, data and telecommunications processing systems required for successful innovation.
- **Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning, including Big Data:** This technological area focusses on the interaction between data science, Big Data and data mining as well as the methods used to process data via algorithms and other learning methods into specific use cases.

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<sup>1</sup> European Innovation Council (EIC) Work Programme 2023 [https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/wp-call/2023/wp\\_horizon-eic-2023\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/wp-call/2023/wp_horizon-eic-2023_en.pdf)





- **Biotechnology and Life Sciences:** Biotechnology and life sciences represents cutting edge Deep Tech technology in terms of natural and synthetic materials and research, including genetic therapies and digital technologies.
- **Communications and Networks, including 5G:** Communications and connectivity in terms of Deep Tech refers to research and innovation in areas such as 5G / 6G Networks, Navigation Systems, Telematics and Materials and Communications Security.
- **Cybersecurity and Data Protection:** This area focusses on the application of Deep Tech technologies to network and data security and protection. This includes the trustworthiness and certification of ICT products: Internet of Things (IoT) and 5G, Machine Learning (ML) and Artificial Intelligence (AI), Encryption Systems and Methods, Intrusion Detection Systems and Methods and Privacy-Enhancing Technologies and Methods.
- **Electronics and Photonics:** The Deep Tech technological dimension of electronics and photonics typically refers to technology used in Quantum Computing as well as Semiconductor manufacturing. There are a wide range of technological applications that include, but are not limited to: Quantum Computing, Microelectronics / Circuit Board Engineering, Photonic Engineering, Haptic, AI and VR/AR Engineering and Power Management.
- **Internet of Things, W3C, Semantic Web:** This Deep Tech technological area focusses on the physical and network systems for Internet of Things; the communications protocols and data structure for embedded and interconnected devices and systems.
- **Robotics:** Robotics includes development of hardware and software solutions for process and machine automation.
- **Semiconductors (microchips):** In addition to the scientific frontiers of semiconductor research, recent policy concerns incorporates re-onshoring or security of supply of semiconductor production. Deep Tech areas of interest include, but are not limited to: Advanced Microchip Manufacturing Methods, Other Microchip Applications, Non-Conventional Computing Systems and Semiconductors, Haptic, AI and VR/AR Engineering, Power Management and Environmental Health and Safety / Circularity.
- **Sustainable Energy and Clean Technologies:** Sustainable Energy focuses on renewable and environmentally friendly energy sources, while Clean Technologies involve the development of solutions that minimize environmental impact and promote sustainable practices.
- **Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality, Metaverse:** This technological area focusses on the creation and application of digital information and content, either in a partial or fully-immersive environment. Examples include, but are not limited to: Augmented Reality, Virtual Reality, Metaverse and Other Advanced Digital Applications and Hardware.





- **Web 3.0, including Blockchain, Distributed Ledgers, NFTs:** This technological area focusses on Web 3.0 applications insofar as these relate to solving a major societal challenge. Examples include, but are not limited to Web 3.0, Blockchain and NFT.

Applicants are advised that, in a subsequent phase following the evaluation process, if selected, they will be asked to complete an Ethics Self-Assessment. This step is crucial to ensure ethical compliance in the areas of research and development. Full cooperation is expected from the chosen startup in this regard.

6. **Companies located in the list of eligible countries and regions:** Only applicants legally established in any of the following countries (hereafter collectively identified as the “Eligible Countries”) are eligible for funding:
  - **Widening Area Countries:** Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.
  - **Outermost regions:** Guadeloupe, French Guiana, Réunion, Martinique, Mayotte and Saint-Martin (France), Canary Islands (Spain), Guadeloupe, French Guiana, Réunion, Martinique, Mayotte and Saint-Martin (France).
  - **Associated countries:** Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Faroe Islands, North Macedonia, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, Tunisia, Turkey and Ukraine.

Should the definition of Widening Area be updated by the European Union institutions our restrictions may change. The valid list will be the existing one at the time of the closure of the call.

## 3.2 Financial Support

**The first call boasts a total budget of 527,500 EUR.** Beyond the financial grant, EmpoWomen extends support through mentoring, coaching, and networking opportunities, fostering an environment conducive to achieving project objectives.

In this OC#1, EmpoWomen is committed to providing equity-free funding to empower **up to 11 startups** led by women. Additionally, the programme incorporates three distinct vouchers aimed at enhancing the entrepreneurial journey. These vouchers encompass coverage for participation in EU tech summits, access to a dedicated mentor for the company, and an exclusive programme on business angels' investment, facilitated directly by seasoned angel investors with relevant expertise and geographical alignment.

The grant is disbursed over the course of the EmpoWomen project, following a "flat rate" approach. This means that the funding is distributed gradually, subject to meeting specific outcomes and milestones, rather than administrative justifications of time and/or expenses.



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### 3.2.1 Indicative distributions of the funds and Vouchers

Payments and vouchers will be distributed in multiple stages throughout the project's timeline, subject to the achievement of specified milestones or key performance indicators and the attainment of specific results. All of these disbursements operate in parallel with the execution of the acceleration program (**section 6**).

Table 1. Payment milestones

Project Duration	Month 1	Month 3	Month 6
	<b>Coaching Plan &amp; KPIs definition</b>	<b>MID-TERM REVIEW</b>	<b>FINAL REVIEW</b>
<b>Output</b>	D1. Individual Programme KPIs	Participate in at least 80% of the project acceleration activities until month 3.	Achievement of established KPIs for month 6.
		Achievement of established KPIs for month 3.	All the payments will be held to those teams who have engaged with less than 75% of the program content during the 6 months Participation of the startups in the final demo day.
<b>Grant per Team (EUR)</b>	5,000 EUR	20,000 EUR	20,000 EUR
<b>Vouchers</b>	Vouchers will be unlocked progressively during the programme. Startups will be allowed to request the voucher depending on the expertise and the stage of the programme reached.		

**Payments will be done at beginning of the months following the output deliverables. (Beginning of M2, Months 4 and Months 7)**

- **Voucher 1. Access to Events:** Covering expenses for attending EU tech summits. Participation in at least 2 events per startup. The events (different from the Demo Day) will be communicated by the EmpoWomen consortium during the execution of the acceleration program. **Valued at 5,000 EUR per startup.**
- **Voucher 2. Business Angels (BA) Investment Readiness Programme:** Dedicated programme on business angels' investment provided directly by real angel investors who have an overlap within their expertise/geography. **Valued at 2,400 EUR per startup.**



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- **Voucher 3. Mentoring:** up to 16 sessions of a dedicated mentor for the company. **Valued at 5,000 EUR per startup.**

Vouchers will be directly paid by EmpoWomen consortium to the providers of services (events, mentors, etc.) The value of the vouchers is added on top of the cash received by the startups, never deducted.

**Projects will be paid according to their overall completion of KPIs. Only in the case of an underperformance below 25% the team will be disqualified, and no further payment released. Regarding payments, the beneficiary must comply with a series of rules and conditions that can be found in greater detail in the Sub-Grant Agreement ([Annex 3](#)).**

### 3.2.2 Demo Day

The **Demo Day**, a crucial event at the end of the programme, will provide beneficiaries with the opportunity to showcase their startups to programme mentors and external judges. On this day, the EmpoWomen Awards Ceremony will take place, where the performance and potential of the startups will be assessed. **It is important to note that the attendance of all beneficiaries is mandatory to ensure their eligibility for the final payment.** The top three startups, selected during this event, will receive project prizes based on their ranking.

- **Prize 1:** 15,000 EUR
- **Prize 2:** 11,500 EUR
- **Prize 3:** 6,000 EUR

## 3.3 Origin of Funds

Once an applicant has been selected for funding, they will be required to sign a dedicated Sub-Grantee Funding Agreement with the EmpoWomen consortium. It is important to note that the funds attached to the Sub-Grantee Funding Agreement come directly from the funds of the Horizon Europe Project EmpoWomen, which has been funded by the European Commission. Therefore, the funds remain the property of the EU until the payment of the balance, which is managed by the project partners in EmpoWomen via European Commission Horizon Europe Grant Agreement Number 101120693.

The Sub-Grantee Funding Agreement represents a significant commitment from both the EmpoWomen programme and the sub-grantees who will receive funding. The relationship between sub-grantees and the European Commission through the EmpoWomen programme carries a set of obligations for the sub-grantees with the European Commission. These obligations will be outlined in the Sub-Grantee Agreement, which the selected applicants will need to review and agree to. It is the responsibility of the sub-grantees to ensure that they fulfil these obligations, and the EmpoWomen consortium partners will provide guidance and support as needed.



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All selected applicants should carefully review the terms of the agreement and ensure that they are able to meet their obligations in order to receive the funding and successfully carry out their project.

### 3.4 Allocation of funds per project.

The financing provided for each sub-granted project is determined through a lump sum scheme, taking into account the requirements specified in the call text and the duration of the programme.

The total funding limit for a single organization across all EmpoWomen calls is set at **60,000 EUR**. An organization could only reach this maximum amount if it receives the 45,000 EUR grant upon completing the entire programme and emerges as the winner of the first prize, securing an additional 15,000 EUR at the Demo Day.

EmpoWomen will have a total of two calls, where up to 25 startups will benefit. The goal is to select up to 11 startups for the OC#1 and 14 for the second open call. Therefore, for this initial call, the total available budget is 527,500 EUR. The number of startups chosen per call may vary. If there are not enough projects financed in the first call until the available budget is exhausted, the remaining budget will be allocated to the second open call.

### 3.5 Language

English is the official language for the EmpoWomen open calls. Submissions done in any language other than English will not be eligible or evaluated.

English is the only official language during the whole implementation of the EmpoWomen programme. This means that any requested submission of documentation and deliverables will be done in English to be eligible, and the programme activities will be only held in English.

### 3.6 Documents format

Any documentation requested in any of the phases of the open call and programmes' implementation must be submitted electronically in PDF format without restrictions for printing.

### 3.7 Absence of conflict of interest

**Applicants must not have any actual or potential conflicts of interest during the EmpoWomen selection process or the entire project duration.** Any situations that could potentially influence



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the impartiality of the individuals taking part in the selection process, or during the project implementation, are considered conflicts of interest. These can include financial interests, personal relationships, or any other factors that could affect the applicant's ability to remain impartial. All cases of conflict of interest will be assessed on a case-by-case basis by the relevant EmpoWomen selection committee and consortium partners. **If an applicant is found to have a conflict of interest, this could result in the application being disqualified.**

It is important to note that **EmpoWomen consortium partners, their affiliated entities, employees, and permanent co-operators are not allowed to submit a proposal and therefore to receive any financial support through the open calls**, as this would violate the European Commission's regulations.

### 3.8 Ethical Issues

**EmpoWomen strictly adheres to the fundamental ethical principles outlined in the "European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity."** To ensure compliance, all applicants are required to acknowledge and accept our privacy policy and declaration of honor (ethics) during the submission process. This acknowledgment confirms that, by submitting the form, they accept the terms described in the provided text. No additional documents need to be uploaded; applicants are solely required to read and agree to the terms outlined when submitting the form.

During the evaluation process, **the EmpoWomen consortium may verify whether the self-assessment declaration aligns with the contents of the application.** In cases where clarification is needed, the consortium reserves the right to contact the beneficiaries. If an applicant indicates that their application may have ethical issues, an ethics review will be conducted. Applications that fail to adequately address ethical concerns or privacy aspects will be rejected.

All applicants must thoroughly review and assess their applications for any potential ethical issues before submission. **Failure to comply with the ethical guidelines outlined in the "European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity" could lead to disqualification of the application.** Therefore, it is of utmost importance that all applicants take the necessary steps to ensure that their proposals meet the highest ethical standards.

### 3.9 Data Protection

**EmpoWomen requires access to Personal and Entity Data in order to process and evaluate applications.** As open call coordinator, SPLORO will act as the Data Controller for all data submitted through the Sploro platform for this purpose. To ensure the safety and security of this data, the Sploro platform has been designed and operates under strict compliance with The General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR). Therefore, all applicants are required to accept the



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## Guidelines for Applicants. EmpoWomen Open Call #1



Sploro Platform terms to ensure full coverage. For more information regarding the data privacy policy and security measures implemented by Sploro, please refer to their website at <https://sploro.eu>.



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## 4. Proposal submission process

### 4.1 Overall process

The submission will be done through the official online submission platform, which is directly linked to the EmpoWomen website. Only applications received directly through the online submission platform will be considered eligible.

We will provide applicants with an editable template of the application form ([see Annex 1](#)) to let them prepare the application offline before introducing the information in the form available at the Sploro platform. **Sending this form template in any other format and via e-mail or any other means will automatically disqualify the submission.**

If the applicant discovers an error in a submitted application or aims to improve the application, the applicant may submit a new version provided the call deadline has not passed. For this, the applicant must get in touch with the managers of the open call (SPLORO) at EmpoWomen to reopen the application through the support channel. Applicants will be able to modify all answers of the application form as many times as needed until the deadline. Please be aware that once opened, the applicants should send the form again, or it will not be evaluated. Once resubmitted, only the last version received before the call deadline will be considered in the evaluation.

EmpoWomen offers a dedicated **support channel** available for applicants at [helpdesk@empowomen.eu](mailto:helpdesk@empowomen.eu). Requests will receive a response within 72 hours of their submission. While all possible effort will be made to respond in a timely manner, the teams should plan their submission accordingly, allowing enough time before the deadline (i.e., at least 72 hours prior) if they expect an answer.

Please note that any email received outside the designated support channel will not be taken into account. It is imperative that all requests or inquiries related to the submission system or the call itself are directed through the official support channel. Requests or inquiries received AFTER two days before the closure time of the call will neither be considered nor answered. Lack of receipt of an answer to an inquiry shall not constitute grounds for an extension or re-evaluation of a submission.

### 4.2 Documents to be submitted

The application process will be exclusively through the **SPLORO platform**. Before you begin, we recommend carefully reviewing [Annex 1](#), a preliminary version of the form, to familiarize yourself with key elements.



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The application process is structured into sections designed to evaluate the **excellence, impact, and implementation**. External evaluators, experts in various fields, will use these criteria to select the most promising projects.

All required documents, such as the SME Declaration ([Annex 2](#)), CVs, and the Pitch Deck, must be uploaded **in PDF format** through the SPLORO platform.

[Application form](#): an online form divided in different sections:

1) Legal and Contact Information:

- Collects essential participant and organization details.
- Captures eligibility information, legal status, and registration details.
- Designates a contact point within the organization.

2) Project Description:

- Outlines core activities, addressing a specific problem.
- Identifies the deep tech technologies targeted.
- Assesses the solution's readiness level and ownership of intellectual property.

3) **Excellence:**

- Addresses objectives in the EmpoWomen call.
- Highlights technological innovation, advancements, and uniqueness.
- Explores collaborations, achievements, and scientific or technical progress.

4) **Impact:**

- Details business overview, target market, and competitors.
- Identifies barriers to entry and strategies to overcome them.
- Describes potential customers, business model, and fundraising plans.

5) **Implementation:**

- Profiles key team members, emphasizing gender equity and diversity.
- Explores team's deep tech industry experience and achievements.
- Covers the female founder's active participation and previous startup experience.





6) Areas of Interest for Acceleration Programme:

- Seeks insights into specific areas where the startup would benefit.
- Covers product development, sales, pitching, legal considerations, fundraising, and other areas.

7) Privacy Policy:

- Ensures understanding and compliance with open call details.
- Confirms correctness and completeness of information.
- Asserts eligibility and absence of conflict of interest.

8) Declaration of Honour:

- Certifies accuracy, completeness, and compliance.
- Commits to participation, stable funding, and necessary resources.
- Declares no administrative sanctions, exclusion situations, or conflicts of interest.

Applicants must strictly adhere to the form provided by EmpoWomen consortium via Sploro platform, which defines sections and the overall length. Evaluators will be instructed not to consider extra material in the evaluation.

### 4.3 Application preparation

For the successful submission, applicants are strongly advised to follow these steps:

1. Check the guidelines for applicants to determine if your organisation is eligible for the programme.
2. Applicants are required to apply online and answer all mandatory questions (with no exception) at: [https://bit.ly/EmpoWomen\\_OC1](https://bit.ly/EmpoWomen_OC1). Moreover, applicants must submit all the requested documents established in the call. The lack of any of the documents will negatively affect the eligibility of the applicant for the evaluation process. In addition, note that certain documents - which will be required for each applicant selected for the programme and signing a sub-grantee agreement - may take time to acquire. It is highly



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advisable that you read the **Section 5.5: Sub-grant agreement preparation** and take into consideration the time needed to obtain these documents.

3. Be concrete and concise. Open questions have character limitations. Please examine all the open call documents and attend at least one of the online events promoted by the EmpoWomen programme to be prepared. Please, mark your calendars for our upcoming InfoDays:
  - **1st InfoDay:** January 17, 2024
  - **2nd InfoDay:** February 15, 2024
4. Only the submission within the Open Call duration will be accepted. There will not be any deadline extensions unless there is a Force Majeure situation (i.e., a major problem with the platform caused by the EmpoWomen consortium and not by the applicants, making the system unavailable for a long period). It is strongly advised not to wait until the last minute.



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## 5. Proposal Evaluation and Selection Process

### 5.1 Application reception

Submissions will be done ONLY via the [Sploro platform](#), and it will be the unique entry point for all application submissions. Applications submitted by any other means will not be considered nor evaluated. Only the documentation included in the submission will be considered by evaluators. A full list of applicants will be drafted containing their basic information for statistical purposes and clarity (which will be also shared with the EC for transparency). The application reception will close on **08.03.2024, 17:00 CET**. There will not be any deadline extensions unless there is a Force Majeure situation, caused by the EmpoWomen consortium and not by the applicants, which renders the system unavailable.

### 5.2 Evaluation process

The evaluation process to be followed during the selection of the applicants is shown in the following figure. Before entering into the programme, a three-step evaluation will take place:

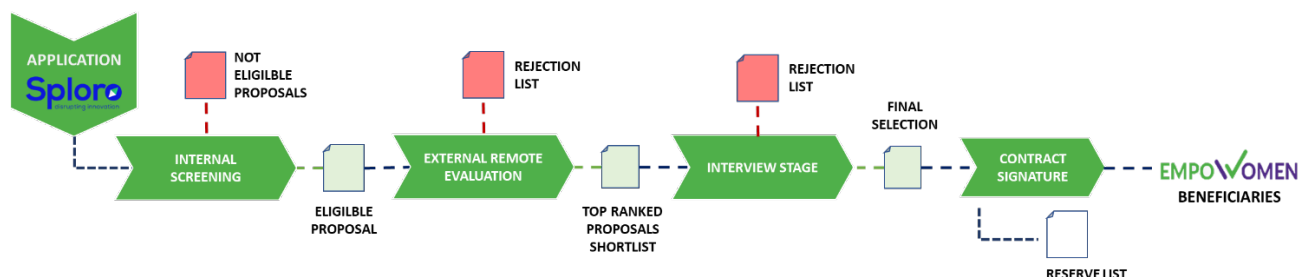


Figure 2. Evaluation process

The evaluation process will be evaluated according to the following categories:

#### 5.2.1 Eligibility criteria

An automatic filtering to discard non-eligible proposals will follow the shortlist below. Eligibility criteria check will verify:

- All the required fields in the online application form have been completed and all documents are uploaded.
- The startup is a 'deep tech' company.
- The start-up is founded or co-founded by women holding a top management position (CEO, CTO or equivalent) in the company at the time of submission.
- The existence of a legal entity.





- e) Registration of the company before the opening of the call and with less than 6 years since registration (deadline date set by submission deadline)
- f) Company classification as SME. A SME will be considered as such if complying with the European Commission Recommendation 2003/361/EC<sup>16</sup> and, the SME user guide<sup>17</sup>. In a summary, the criteria which define an SME are:
  - o Independent (not linked or owned by another enterprise), by Recommendation 2003/361/EC.
  - o Headcount in Annual Work Unit (AWU) less than 250.
  - o Annual turnover less or equal to 50 million EUR OR annual balance sheet total less or equal to 43 million EUR.
- g) Having raised less than 1M EUR in equity or public funding until submission date.
- h) The uniqueness of the proposal (proposal not already funded in the Women TechEU initiative and/or any other identical project to avoid double funding).
- i) Companies located in the list of eligible countries or regions.

**Applications marked as non-eligible will get a rejection letter including the reasons (a to i) for being declared as non-eligible. No further feedback on the process will be given.**

### 5.2.2 Experts' remote evaluation

The proposals that pass the eligibility check will move to the remote evaluation stage. Applications will be assessed by a group of external and independent evaluators with an entrepreneurial, investment or innovation background. The evaluators will assess the proposals based on 3 different evaluation criteria (**Excellence, Impact and Implementation**).

- 1) **Excellence:** projects must demonstrate high quality and a clear set of objectives aligned with the EmpoWomen vision and with the general objectives of the project. The Excellence is evaluated according to the following criteria:
  - a) Alignment of the application with the call and the EIC accelerator [criteria](#);
  - b) Degree of deep-tech innovation (i.e., going beyond the state-of-the-art, chances to succeed, its feasibility);
  - c) Current traction/implementation/achievements of the project.
- 2) **Impact:** The impact is evaluated according to the following criteria:
  - a) The quality of the future implementation plan;





- b) Business plan (i.e., whether it is realistic and convincing, whether the applicant demonstrated market need and willingness to pay, as well as commercialisation plan and market entry plan);
  - c) The growth potential of the proposed innovation/solution in terms of turnover, profit, and jobs, as well as its broader economic impact;
  - d) How critical this grant is for the company, and whether it will make a difference and add value to the company.
  - e) IPR aspects.
- 3) **Implementation:** The implementation is evaluated according to the following criteria:
- a) Relevance of the female (co-)founder role in the company (i.e., whether the woman (co-)founder has a leading role in the company, whether she is the decision-maker, whether she has a management capacity and whether she can bring the company to the next level);
  - b) An overall gender balance and the position held by women in the start-up;
  - c) Team's skills, motivation, and commitment to execute the project;
  - d) Quality and efficiency of the work plan (i.e., whether the proposed activities are sound and well explained, as well as whether these activities are most needed at this stage).

The selected evaluators will be independent of the organisations involved in the consortium and of any third party applying to the call. The evaluators will sign a declaration of confidentiality concerning the contents of the proposals they read. The form which they use in the evaluation carries a declaration of freedom from conflict of interest which they agree to by signing them. Proposals will be evaluated by 2 independent evaluators. All evaluators will receive the evaluation guidelines, templates, and will be duly informed about the timing for an agile process and conflict of interest issues.

The evaluators will score each award criterion on a scale from 0 to 5:





Table 2. Criteria score

Score	Definition
0	Proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information.
1	Poor – criterion is inadequately addressed or there are serious inherent weaknesses.
2	Fair – proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses
3	Good – proposal addresses the criterion well, but a number of shortcomings are present.
4	Very good- proposal addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present.
5	The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.

The total score will be calculated as an average of the score of the 3 different criteria. **The threshold for each criterion will be three (3), while the overall score threshold will be ten (10).** That means if a proposal receives less than 3 in one criterion or less than 10 overall score, will not be recommended for funding by the independent evaluators and will be automatically rejected.

### 5.2.3 Normalisation score

For the final grade calculation, there will be two evaluators per proposal, where each one will score differently without knowing the evaluation of their colleague, thus avoiding one evaluator conditioning the other. Therefore, the same evaluation may receive very different scores.

The normalisation process counts with a several steps approach:

- **External Evaluators Average (EEA) and Overall Average Score (OAS):** each evaluator has evaluated several proposals. We calculate the average score of all applicants and compare it with the average score of each evaluator.
- Each External Evaluator Average is compared to the Overall Average Score using a simple division (EEA / OAS). As a result, we know the percentage each evaluator represents of the OAS. This has a double meaning:





- Evaluators under 100% have a negative pattern against the average. Their scores are then increased.
- Evaluators above 100% have a positive pattern against the average. Their scores are then decreased.
- **Correction factor:** Based on this formula  $1 + (1 - (EEA/OAS))$ . This factor is unique for each evaluator.
- The following step is applying the Correction Factor to each criterion per evaluator. **Excellence x Correction Factor | Impact x Correction factor | Implementation x Correction factor.**
- Then we calculate the final score of each criterion as the average of each corrected score of the two evaluators on each proposal. (It may be the case that correction brings scores over a 5 in any criteria. In those cases, the score is capped in 5).
- We add the corrected scores and calculate the total score.
- Finally, we build the shortlist according from highest to lowest total score.

Using this method, a more balanced distribution of scores would be guaranteed, and the possibility of biases and distortions would be reduced. At the end of the evaluation process, all proposals will be ranked based on their scores. The list of accepted proposals at remote evaluation will be published as well as the information about the non-eligible proposals. All applicants will be informed about the evaluation results.

### 5.2.4 Interview stage

The top-ranked projects of the external remote evaluation shall be duly invited to participate in an online interview. Given that the interview will be recorded, utmost consideration shall be accorded to data protection throughout the process. **The interview aims to deeply understand project concepts, team skills & competence.** At least 2 external evaluators will carry out the interviews.

The evaluation of this stage will be simple. The 2 evaluators will determine individually if the proposal they are interviewing should move forward with a yes/no decision. Each yes decision will motivate an extra 1 point in the overall evaluation and a new shortlist list will be populated.

At the end of the evaluation process all proposals will be ranked based on their scores (15 points from remote evaluation + 2 points from interview maximum).

### 5.2.5 Final Selection

At the end of the evaluation process all proposals will be ranked based on their scores, and the best proposals will be invited to sign the sub-grant agreement ([Annex 3](#)) and participate in the programme. The list of accepted proposals at remote evaluation will be published as well as the





information about the noneligible proposals. All applicants will be informed about the evaluation results.

The criteria for the ranking of the proposals will be semi-automatic following the rules below:

- **Rule 1:** The proposals will be ranked based on their overall score.
- **Rule 2:** In case following Rule 1 there are proposals in the same position, priority will be given to proposals that have higher score on the Excellence & Impact award criterion.
- **Rule 3:** In case following Rule 2 there are proposals in the same position, priority will be given to proposals that have a higher score on the 3 Implementation and Use of resources of the proposed team innovation award criterion.
- **Rule 4:** In case following Rule 3 there are proposals in the same position, priority will be given to the total number of women in the team.

The EmpoWomen consortium will then formally approve a list of proposals within the limits of the available funding.

Prior to contracting to the top ranked applicants, the consortium will ask for the approval of the European Commission, and the list of selected projects will be submitted to the European Commission for final screening. Once validated, the project will communicate the results and every applicant will receive via email: An Evaluation Summary Report (ESR) and a letter informing of the rejection decision or invitation to negotiation and following steps.

### 5.3 Appealing procedure

The EmpoWomen consortium has established a process that allows applicants to appeal the decision of the consortium in the event their proposal is not selected for funding. If, at any point during the evaluation process, an applicant believes that there has been a deficiency in how their proposal was assessed, which could potentially impact the final funding decision, or if they believe that the results of eligibility checks are incorrect and do not adhere to the Open Call rules, resulting in harm to their interests, the following appeal procedure is available.

- If clear evidence of a deficiency that could influence the ultimate funding decision exists, it is possible that all or part of the proposal will be subject to re-evaluation.
- Complaints must be submitted within **five (calendar) days** from the date of receiving the evaluation results.
- As a general guideline, the EmpoWomen Team will investigate complaints with the aim of reaching a decision to issue a formal notice or to close the case within no more than **twenty days from the date of receiving the complaint**, provided that all required information has been submitted by the complainant.



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- In cases where this time limit is exceeded, the EmpoWomen team will inform the complainant via email. If a definitive response cannot be provided at that stage, the response will indicate when a definitive response will be furnished.
- It should be noted that the EmpoWomen consortium does not commit to engage in any further discussion regarding the evaluation of a proposal beyond the definitive response.

**Please be aware that only one request for appeal per proposal will be considered by the consortium.**

## 5.4 Validation of the legal entity

Before validating the final list of accepted applicants, we will perform a thorough validation of the legal entities. This validation includes the submission of various documents to ensure compliance with the EmpoWomen programme's requirements. The requested elements for validation that will be requested are:

- For entities that are already validated by the European Commission's Funding and Tenders Portal that count with a registered and validated PIC Number we will request the PIC Number and a screenshot of the Funding and Tenders portal in which it's evidenced the type of organisation which has been selected as a beneficiary (university, NGO, foundation, SME...)

For those entities without a validated PIC number OR without a validated status (like self-declared SMEs) we will request:

- **Legal entity form.** The Legal Entity form for [private companies](#), and [public law bodies](#) necessary for the awarding of EU funding. Company Register, Official Journal and so forth, showing the name of the organisation, the legal address and registration number and
- **VAT Number registration** (if applicable), a copy of a document proving VAT registration (in case the VAT number does not show on the registration extract or its equivalent).
- **SME declaration** ([see Annex 2](#)): form based on the standard templates by the EC in which the consortium can verify the ownership structure and financial figures to verify the size of the company.
- Balance accounts and P&L for the last two closed years (if applicable)
- In companies with linked or associated entities, additional information (accounts for mother companies, group trees, etc.) could be requested.

**A legal entity that does not provide the requested data and documents in due time will not be included in EmpoWomen Programme.**



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## 5.5 Sub-grant agreement preparation

After the validation of the Legal Entity, a written Sub-grantee agreement will be signed with successful applicants, and the EmpoWomen coordinator will request the applicant to fill a Financial Identification Form (FIF).

- **Sub-grantee funding agreement ([Annex 3](#))**. Signed between the Consortium (represented by the coordinator SPLORO) and the beneficiary.
- **Financial Identification Form (FIF)**. Form identifying the account to which the funds will be transferred signed by the legal representative of the organisation and including a bank statement showing the ownership of the account. The coordinator of the consortium, SPLORO, will also provide additional security measures to verify the ownership of the account.
- All the legal issues are accurately covered by the planned contracts with the sub-granted beneficiaries. The sub-grant agreement will foresee, among other things, the special clauses derived from Horizon Europe in cascading granting, the payment schedule, and conditions (milestones), general legal text issues of rights and obligations by the EmpoWomen consortium and each sub-grantee, including IPR. It will also have a set of annexes such as the description of the project, the Financial Identification Form and any other document required by EmpoWomen consortium to assure the correct execution of the sub-granted projects.

The sub-granted projects will also define in the Individual Mentoring Plan their coaching plan and their research, business, and milestones linked to a set of KPIs, to which the project will associate the payment at the end of each phase. The objective of the contract preparation is fulfilling the legal requirements between the EmpoWomen consortium and every beneficiary of the call.

After signing the sub-grant agreement, beneficiaries will be eligible to participate in the Empowomen Acceleration Program.





## 6. Acceleration Programme

This unique **EmpoWomen Accelerator** offers a 6-month programme of dedicated intensive support to the selected group of women deep tech entrepreneurs, with a view to enabling them to significantly boost their business growth and increase their potential to access investment.

The **EmpoWomen Accelerator Programme** is delivered by two leading European players:

- **StartUp Wise Guys (SWG)**, one of the top 5 accelerators according to European top tier VCs (as ranked by Sifted in December 2022) that focuses on entrepreneurs in underserved markets and fast tracks their growth, and
- **Business Angels Europe (BAE)**, mobilising the investment potential of national angel investment communities from East to West of Europe, bringing access to investment from the most experienced European angel groups to back growth-potential entrepreneurs from start up to scale up.

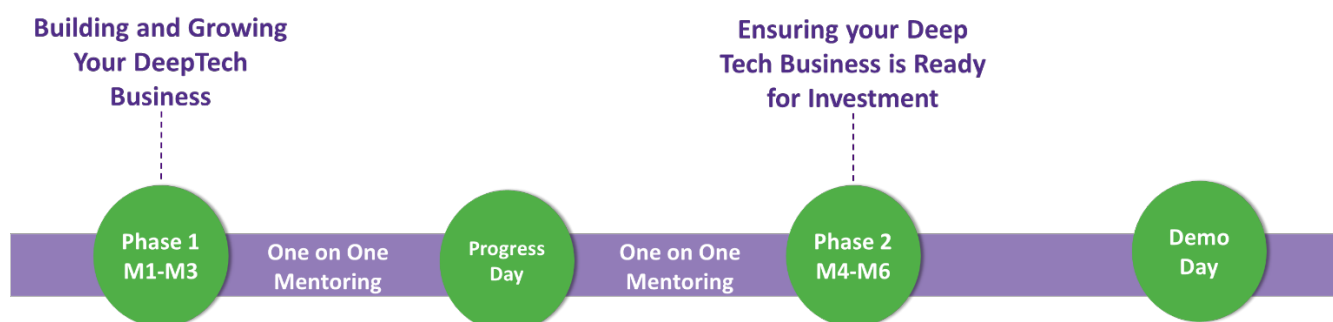


Figure 3. Comprehensive 6-Month Startup Acceleration Journey.

The EmpoWomen Accelerator programme consists of two 3-month phases:

### Accelerator Phase 1: Months 1-3: Building and Growing Your DeepTech Business

Delivered by StartUp Wise Guys (SWG), enables the selected cohort of women entrepreneurs to experience an intensive programme, focused on addressing key growth challenges in building their business and tailored to their personal goals. Support will be delivered through a programme of online webinar sessions, delivered by experts in business, industry and deep technologies. This will be accompanied by access to one on one expert mentoring sessions offered throughout the programme.



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Through a series of weekly modules, participants will work through key business growth areas including:

1. Your core Business Purpose and Values
  - Refining your mission, vision, and culture
  - Identifying the key steps for growth journey
  - Establishing your own personal goals and KPIs
  
2. Product Execution and Sales
  - Establishing your Product Market fit
  - Ensuring an effective commercialisation and sales strategy
  
3. Technology Product development and effective planning
  - Ensuring the deep tech product or service is unique and innovative and addresses the needs of your customers and market customers.
  - How to build a defensible competitive position in the market and protecting your IP
  
4. Focus and Execution:
  - How to stay on top of the game and push your business to the next level
  - How to be resilient and address the next crisis.
  
5. Sales and Team Basics
  - Sales, marketing, and branding; Sales funnel: who and how to reach out
  - Building your team and skill set
  - Developing your leadership skills
  
6. Developing your Funding Strategy and understanding your options
  - Preparing your business to engage with investors
  - Identifying your investment needs and options





- Understanding the basic legal and commercial aspects of fundraising

**One on One Mentoring:** Each participant will also have direct access to monthly individual mentoring sessions throughout the 6-month Accelerator programme. This will be provided by individual experts who will be matched to the entrepreneurs and tailored to the technology and sector focus and will enable the women entrepreneurs to focus on their own business goals and identified challenges and needs.

### Progress Review Day

At the end of Phase 1 of the Accelerator programme, there will be a Progress Review Day, where women entrepreneurs will have an in-depth review of their progress in achieving their business objectives (KPIs). This will be carried out by SWG, together with BAE and provide valuable feedback and key insights for the next phase of the Acceleration programme.

### Phase 2: Months 4-6: Ensuring your Deep Tech Business is Ready for Investment

This second phase of the Accelerator programme enables the cohort of women entrepreneurs to gain an in-depth understanding of the whole investment process, addressing any challenges and barriers for women entrepreneurs when seeking investment and looking at the specific requirements for attracting investment for a deep tech business and relevant to their specific sector or market, combined with direct engagement with investors.

This will be provided by Business Angels Europe, delivered by experienced Angel and early stage investors in deep tech and relevant industry sectors. This phase of the programme also offers opportunities for direct engagement with experienced investors in deep tech and the BAE Club of Leading Angel Investment groups across Europe, including potential to showcase at relevant investor events. The three-month programme, delivered in weekly online webinar sessions will cover the following:

1. Developing your Funding Strategy and Creating an attractive Deep Tech Investment proposal.

These sessions will be designed to enable women deep tech entrepreneurs to understand the critical aspects of creating their funding strategy, identify when and why they need funding, the different sources available, and how to strategize their approach to secure investment.



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- Understanding the Investment Market and equity supply chain -what finance is right for your business
- What are Business Angels, angel syndicates and their added value
- Identifying your funding strategy from Angel to Scale-up
- How to use Convertible Loans and ASAs and SAFE
- What Investors are looking for in a deep tech business and how to develop an attractive investment proposal to address the needs of investors.
- Your Toolkit to Attract Investors

## 2. Making a Winning Pitch, effective Negotiations and the Due Diligence process

These sessions will be aimed at mastering the art of pitching and understanding the intricacies of business valuation, due diligence and negotiation with investors

- Mastering the art of pitching and understanding what investors look for
- How to effectively engage with investors after the pitch
- Preparing for Due Diligence ; scope and purpose and how to respond to investors needs
- Understanding how to value your business – art or science?
- How to negotiate and understand what investors require.

## 3. Closing the Deal, Navigating the legal process; Getting the most from your investors post deal

These sessions are designed to take the entrepreneurs through the challenges of finalizing the deal, understanding the legal processes and documents and ensuring that they are well positioned to make the most of their investors post deal.

- Understanding the key elements of the Term Sheet and finalising the deal
- Legal processes – understanding the core documents
- Understanding the Cap table Closing the deal
- What can go wrong and when to walk away
- Making the most of your investors post investment and gaining added value





## Demo Day

The conclusion of the Accelerator Programme will be marked by a Presential Demo Day at which the cohort of women entrepreneurs will each present their business to an audience of invited investors with deep tech expertise and experience from across relevant industries and sectors. The Pitch presentations offer the opportunity of attracting investor interest and gaining direct feedback, one on one interactions with investors and establishing the potential for further follow up meetings. Attendance at the Presential Demo Day is mandatory for all beneficiary startups.



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## 7. Beneficiaries' Responsibilities

The selected organisations are indirectly beneficiaries of European Commission funding. As such, they are responsible for the proper use of the funding and ensure that the recipients comply with obligations under Horizon specific requirements. The obligations that are applicable to the recipients include:

### 7.1 Conflict of interest

Beneficiaries must take all measures to prevent any situation where the impartial and objective implementation of the sub-project is compromised for reasons involving economic interest, political or national affinity, family or emotional ties or any other shared interest ('conflict of interests'). They must formally notify to the EmpoWomen coordinator without delay any situation constituting or likely to lead to a conflict of interest and immediately take all the necessary steps to rectify this situation. The EmpoWomen coordinator may verify that the measures taken are appropriate and may require additional measures to be taken by a specified deadline. If the sub-contracted consortium member breaches any of its obligations, the sub-contract may be automatically terminated. Moreover, costs may be rejected.

### 7.2 Data protection and confidentiality

During implementation of the sub-project and for four years after the end of the sub-project, the parties must keep confidential any data, documents or other material (in any form) that is identified as confidential at sub-contract signing time ('confidential information').

### 7.3 Promotion of the action and EU Funding visibility

The beneficiary must promote their participation in the EmpoWomen project and the benefits obtained as a result of participating in the programme. They will provide targeted information to multiple audiences (including the media and the public) in a strategic and effective manner and to highlight the financial support of the EC. The EmpoWomen Communication Team will guide, provide materials and support these communication activities. Unless the European Commission or the EmpoWomen coordinator requests, or agrees otherwise or unless it is impossible, any communication activity related to the action (including in electronic form, via social media, etc.), any publicity, including at a conference or seminar or any type of information or promotional material (brochure, leaflet, poster, presentation etc.), and any infrastructure, equipment and major results funded by the grant must:



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- display the EU emblem;
- display the EmpoWomen logo.

When displayed in association with a logo, the European emblem should be given appropriate prominence. This obligation to use the European emblem in respect of projects to which the EC contributes implies no right of exclusive use. It is subject to general third-party use restrictions which do not permit the appropriation of the emblem, or of any similar trademark or logo, whether by registration or by any other means. Under these conditions, the Beneficiary is exempted from the obligation to obtain prior permission from the EC to use the emblem. Further detailed information on the EU emblem can be found on the [Europa web page](#). Any publicity made by the beneficiary in respect of the project, in whatever form and on or by whatever medium, must specify that it reflects only the author's views and that the EC or EmpoWomen project is not liable for any use that may be made of the information contained therein. The EC and the EmpoWomen consortium shall be authorized to publish, in whatever form and on or by whatever medium, the following information:

- the name of the beneficiary;
- contact address of the beneficiary;
- 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 relating to the foreground;
- the details/references and the abstracts of scientific publications relating to the foreground and, if funded within the sub-project, the published version or the final manuscript accepted for publication;
- the publishable reports submitted to the EmpoWomen consortium;
- any picture or any audio-visual or web material provided to the EC and EmpoWomen in the framework of the project.

The beneficiary shall ensure that all necessary authorisations for such publication have been obtained and that the publication of the information by the EC and EmpoWomen does not infringe any rights of third parties. Upon a duly substantiated request by the beneficiary, EmpoWomen, if such permission is provided by the EC, may agree to forego such publicity if disclosure of the information indicated above would risk compromising the beneficiary's security, academic or commercial interests.





## 7.4 Financial audits and control

The European Commission (EC) will monitor compliance with the financial support conditions outlined in Annex 1 of the EmpoWomen Grant Agreement by beneficiaries and third parties. The EC may conduct financial audits, which may be conducted by external auditors or by EC services, including the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF). Beneficiaries must make all detailed information and data available to the EC or any authorized representative for audit purposes. The beneficiary must keep all sub-project deliverables and documents for up to five years from the end of the project.

## 7.5 Internal communication

Each of the teams selected to join the programme must nominate a primary contact point that will act as a coordinator during the duration of the programme.

- Provide any notice in writing to the EmpoWomen programme coordinator.
- Notify immediately of any change of persons or contact details to [hello@empowomen.eu](mailto:hello@empowomen.eu). The address list shall be accessible to all concerned.

## 7.6 External communication and open data

Each funded organisation will be publicly listed at EmpoWomen public channels like social networks or website. The funding disbursed by the EmpoWomen consortium to each of the beneficiaries will be made public under a dataset that will be uploaded into an open a free repository as it is Zenodo.

