

EIT Higher Education Initiative Call 2026

Project Design and Implementation Guide

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1. Purpose of this Guide

This Guide supports applicants and funded projects in interpreting and implementing the Project Design and Implementation Requirements set out in the EIT HEI Call 2026. It provides practical guidance, examples and further explanation to help consortia design coherent projects, plan implementation and make effective use of the EIT HEI portfolio and Community.

The Call text remains the authoritative source for all requirements, eligibility conditions, deadlines and obligations. The examples in this Guide are illustrative and non-exhaustive. Applicants are not expected to implement every example; they should select approaches appropriate to the needs, maturity and priorities of their participating higher education institutions (HEIs).

2. How to use this Guide

The Guide follows the structure of the Call where relevant. Section references point to the corresponding sections of the EIT HEI Call 2026. It focuses on practical design and implementation guidance and does not reproduce every Call requirement. Where a requirement is mandatory, consult the Call text to confirm its exact wording and conditions.

3. EIT HEI Call 2026: Intervention Logic and General Requirements Guidance

a. Designing a coherent intervention

A strong proposal demonstrates a clear line of sight between:

Institutional needs → Policy Objectives and Specific Objectives → selected Funded Actions and activities → outputs → expected results → sustainable institutional change.

The HEInnovate self-assessment and the IVAP should provide the basis for identifying institutional needs and priorities. The selected Funded Actions and project activities should respond to those needs and contribute to the Call's Policy Objectives, Specific Objectives and Sub-objectives. The proposal should explain the expected outputs and results and how these will support longer-term change.

b. HEInnovate self-assessment and identification of institutional priorities

Each participating higher education institution (HEI) is required to complete the HEInnovate self-assessment as a basis for identifying its institutional strengths, needs and priorities in entrepreneurship and innovation, and for determining where support from the EIT Higher Education Initiative can generate the greatest added value.

HEIs are strongly encouraged to approach the self-assessment as a participatory institutional exercise, involving as many relevant members of their communities as possible. Rather than relying on the perspective of a single

institutional representative, each HEI should invite a diverse range of stakeholders, which can include academic and administrative staff, professors, researchers, students and institutional leadership, to complete the self-assessment. By collecting different perspectives, institutions can develop a more comprehensive and representative understanding of their current innovation and entrepreneurship capacity, identify areas of strength and opportunities for improvement, and establish a stronger evidence base for their applications.

Each participating HEI can create its own group on the HEInnovate platform to collect and analyse responses from its institutional community. The results should then be discussed within the institution and shared among consortium partners to build a common understanding of the strengths, challenges and priorities of each participating HEI.

At consortium level, this process provides a valuable opportunity to identify complementarities between partner institutions and opportunities for mutual learning and knowledge exchange. By understanding where individual partners demonstrate particular strengths and where others face challenges, consortia can develop proposals that build on their collective expertise, facilitate the transfer of knowledge and good practices, and promote joint capacity building.

Applicants should use these findings to inform the development of their proposals, ensuring that the proposed activities respond to identified institutional needs while making effective use of the strengths and experiences available across the partnership. In this way, the HEInnovate self-assessment serves not only as a diagnostic exercise but also as a foundation for collaborative action, enabling participating HEIs to learn from one another, strengthen their entrepreneurial and innovation capacities, and grow together as a consortium throughout the EIT Higher Education Initiative project.

c. Impact Domains and Funded Actions

The five Impact Domains are the established areas of intervention within the EIT HEI Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Framework. They provide continuity across EIT HEI Calls and cohorts, supporting consistent monitoring, portfolio-level learning, and the identification, sharing and transfer of effective approaches and good practices. The Policy Objectives, Specific Objectives and Sub-objectives are specific to the EIT HEI Call 2026. They are not part of the terminology of the EIT HEI MEL Framework, which organises its results framework around Impact Domains, Signs of Change, Outcomes and Impact. The Call-specific objectives define the changes projects are expected to contribute to through the established Impact Domain and Funded Action structure.

The five Impact Domains cover:

1. Fostering leadership support and institutional change – strengthening the institutional conditions, leadership engagement and structures needed to embed innovation and entrepreneurship within HEIs.

2. Strengthening partnerships and networks – developing strategic connections between HEIs and external organisations, including industry, research and other innovation actors.
3. Supporting innovation and business generation – strengthening institutional capacity for innovation-driven research, knowledge valorisation, technology transfer and entrepreneurship.
4. Enhancing innovation and entrepreneurship education – developing the competences, curricula, training and experiential learning opportunities needed to strengthen innovation and entrepreneurship among STEM talent.
5. Sharing knowledge and success – capturing, sharing and transferring project experience, results and good practices across the EIT HEI portfolio and Community.

Selection of Funded Actions

All projects must select exactly eight Funded Actions:

- At least one Funded Action from each of Domains 1 – 4.
- Two additional Funded Actions from Domains 1 – 4, selected according to the consortium's institutional needs and priorities.
- Both Funded Actions under Domain 5, which are mandatory for all projects.

The selection should be driven by institutional needs and priorities identified through HEInnovate and reflected in the IVAP, rather than by a requirement to cover every Impact Domain or predefined area of activity. Applicants should show how their selected actions and activities respond to their context and contribute to the Call's objectives.

The Funded Actions provide the mechanism for implementing the intervention; the Policy Objectives and Specific Objectives define the changes the intervention is intended to achieve. Activities should be sufficiently concrete to make the implementation approach credible, while remaining appropriate to the consortium's needs and institutional context.

Illustrative activities for each Funded Action

The examples below are intended to help applicants understand how Funded Actions may be translated into practice. They are illustrative and non-exhaustive, not a prescribed menu. Applicants should develop their own activities in response to their identified needs, IVAP priorities and consortium context.

Impact Domain	Funded Action	Illustrative activities (non-exhaustive)
Domain 1: Fostering leadership support and institutional change	Secure and maintain institutional engagement for the implementation of the IVAP, especially among HEI leadership and its strategy.	Leadership steering groups; institutional development roadmaps; IVAP integration into institutional strategies; implementation reviews.
	Enhance the scale and scope of student engagement activities, including improving student support offices to advise on entrepreneurship and innovation.	Student innovation programmes; entrepreneurship support services; student mentoring; co-working spaces; innovation hubs and virtual hubs; access to innovation challenges.
	Develop inter- and multi-disciplinary support, incentive and collaboration structures (including digital infrastructure) to foster innovation.	Cross-consortium innovation labs; interdisciplinary teams; shared facilities; internal seed funding; mentoring schemes; digital platforms; virtual innovation forums; technology transfer offices (TTOs).
Domain 2: Strengthening partnerships and networks	Establish new collaborations and enhance the nature, content and types of collaborations with external partners, including businesses, research organisations, governmental bodies, NGOs and other societal partners.	Industry–HEI collaborative projects; co-designed industrial challenges; collaboration agreements; industry mentoring; networking; shared expertise and facilities.
	Build partnering capacities among staff and facilitate networking and connections with partners.	Ecosystem and partner mapping; partner matching; networking and brokerage; relationship management; collaborative project development.
Domain 3: Supporting innovation and business generation	Develop and utilise structures and conditions for people to create or develop their businesses and start-ups, and to transfer technology.	Entrepreneurship training and mentoring; founder funding support; incubation and acceleration; shared incubators; start-up communities; IP and licensing support; market assessment; business-model development; investor and industry connections.
	Create structures and conditions for innovation-driven research.	Innovation scouting; researcher–business skills pairing; proof-of-concept funding and validation; prototyping and testbeds; IP assessment; industrial PhD programmes;

		research commercialisation support and training.
Domain 4: Enhancing innovation and entrepreneurship education	Develop or improve the innovation and entrepreneurial curricula.	STEM curriculum development; entrepreneurship and IP modules; challenge-based learning; industry-linked projects; co-created e-learning courses; training-needs surveys.
	Develop innovation and entrepreneurial training programmes and mentoring schemes for staff and students.	Innovation and entrepreneurship training; IP and business-model training; commercialisation skills; MOOCs with mentoring; shared training models; interdisciplinary and international youth entrepreneurship programmes.
	Organise internships in businesses.	Industry placements; internships with companies and start-ups; company-based projects; structured work-based learning; joint internship programmes; internship catalogues and certification; innovation-focused placements.
	Provide up-skilling opportunities to businesses, especially SMEs.	Tailored training; technology upskilling; industry workshops; access to HEI expertise.
	Assessment of teaching and learning practices.	Curriculum and pedagogy reviews; teaching quality assurance; challenge-based learning pilots; assessment of learner and educator outcomes; micro-credential recognition; evidence-based improvement.
Domain 5: Sharing knowledge and success	Collect and share success stories and lessons with others.	Case studies and success stories; good-practice repositories; handbooks; shared resource libraries; knowledge-sharing platforms; training materials; discussion forums; media hubs.
	Engage in joint activities with other EIT Higher Education Initiative project partners via the EIT HEI Community.	Peer-learning workshops; thematic exchanges; cross-project collaboration; joint HEI-KIC workshops; KIC expert contributions to incubation and acceleration; shared capacity-building resources; joint EU-funded project development.

4. Project Design and Implementation Requirements Guidance

a. HEI leadership and institutional engagement

The EIT HEI Call 2026 seeks to support sustainable institutional change rather than isolated activities. Projects should establish the institutional conditions needed for proposed changes to be adopted, maintained and further developed beyond the EIT HEI funding period.

A top management commitment letter from all HEI partners is required as part of the application. The letter must confirm leadership support, alignment with institutional priorities, and commitment to implementing and sustaining the proposed changes. Applicants must use the template provided in the Call's supporting documents.

Engaging HEI leadership

Meaningful engagement should extend beyond the individuals directly involved in project delivery. Depending on the proposed activities and institutional context, projects may involve:

- Senior institutional leadership and decision-makers.
- Faculties, schools and departments.
- Research and innovation offices.
- Knowledge and technology transfer offices.
- Entrepreneurship and business support services.
- Education and curriculum development units.
- Student services and careers offices.
- Professional and administrative staff.
- Relevant infrastructure and technology facilities.

Projects should consider how leadership will remain engaged throughout implementation. Possible approaches include:

- Steering or advisory structures.
- Regular leadership updates and decision points.
- Integration of project priorities into institutional strategies or action plans.
- Allocation of institutional resources.
- Institutional policies or procedures that support the proposed changes.

Embedding and sustainability

The IVAP should explain how project results will become part of the participating HEIs' longer-term institutional development. Depending on the activity, this may include:

- Integration into institutional strategies and policies.
- Permanent or strengthened institutional structures and support services.
- Integration into curricula and educational provision.
- Changes to institutional processes and procedures.
- Continued staff roles and responsibilities.
- Institutional funding or investment plans.
- Continued partnerships and external engagement mechanisms.

Projects should distinguish between activities that can be completed during the funding period and changes that require longer-term institutional commitment. The IVAP should explain how the consortium intends to sustain relevant activities, capabilities and results beyond the project period, including in relation to its 2035 vision.

b. Knowledge Triangle integration

The Knowledge Triangle approach should be reflected in the design of the project as a whole, rather than treated as a requirement to include separate education, research and business activities. Projects should demonstrate how education, research and business/industry perspectives reinforce one another and contribute to the project's objectives.

Depending on the project, this may involve:

- Connecting STEM education and training with real-world industrial or societal challenges.
- Involving students, researchers, educators and industry professionals in common activities.
- Connecting research and technology development with knowledge valorisation, technology transfer and entrepreneurship.
- Providing access to external expertise, infrastructure, pilots, testing facilities, investment or markets.
- Using industry challenges to inform curricula or experiential learning.
- Connecting research results with entrepreneurs, companies or investors.
- Strengthening links between institutional education, research, innovation and support functions.

Consortia should bring together complementary capabilities rather than relying on a single type of organisation. The appropriate combination of HEIs, companies, SMEs, start-ups, research organisations, technology centres, public authorities and other organisations should be determined by the project's objectives and the needs of participating HEIs. The IVAP should make clear:

- The role of each participating organisation.
- The capabilities and resources each partner contributes.
- How partners complement one another.

- How these capabilities contribute to project activities and expected results.
- How the resulting capabilities and relationships can be sustained beyond the project.

c. Connection and alignment with EIT KICs and the EIT Community

Connection with EIT Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) and the wider EIT Community is a distinctive feature of the EIT HEI model. KIC engagement should provide specific added value to the project rather than being limited to general networking.

Selecting relevant KICs

Applicants must identify a minimum of two and a maximum of three EIT KICs relevant to their project, considering the KIC briefing documents prepared specifically for the EIT HEI and provided as part of this Call's supporting documents. Applicants should consider:

- Thematic and sectoral relevance.
- Relevant expertise and networks.
- Programmes, methodologies or services that could strengthen implementation.
- Access to companies, entrepreneurs, research organisations or other ecosystem actors.
- Relevant infrastructure, facilities or innovation support.
- Opportunities for continued collaboration beyond the project.

The proposal should explain why the selected KICs are relevant and what added value their engagement is expected to bring.

Examples of KIC engagement

Depending on the project, meaningful KIC engagement could include:

- Expert contributions to training, workshops or mentoring.
- Access to KIC education and entrepreneurship programmes or methodologies.
- Connections to companies, start-ups, investors, research organisations or other ecosystem actors.
- Participation in innovation challenges or challenge-based learning.
- Access to relevant infrastructure, testbeds, demonstrators or technology environments.
- Support for knowledge valorisation, technology transfer or commercialisation.
- Participation in KIC networks and events.
- Development of joint activities or longer-term partnerships.

These examples are illustrative. Projects should focus on the forms of engagement most relevant to their objectives.

Two-way engagement

KIC engagement is expected to be two-way. Projects should consider not only what they can gain from KICs, but also what relevant expertise, knowledge, networks, approaches, results or opportunities they can contribute to the EIT Community. Projects should identify opportunities for continued collaboration where these emerge during implementation.

KIC role and allocation

KICs are not funded beneficiaries of EIT HEI projects. Following project selection, each funded project will be allocated to one participating KIC for project management. Applicants may indicate their preferred KIC(s), but allocation cannot be guaranteed. Allocation will take into account the relevance of the project to the KICs, the overall distribution of projects and available KIC capacity.

The allocated KIC will act as the project's primary interface with the EIT HEI management team for:

- Contractual and project management matters.
- Implementation support.
- Monitoring and reporting.
- Facilitating access to relevant KIC expertise, networks and opportunities.

The allocation procedure is described in Section 11.5 of the Call. The allocated KIC does not replace broader engagement with the two or three KICs identified in the proposal. Projects are expected to maintain relevant connections with the wider EIT Community throughout implementation.

d. Building on previous EIT HEI and other relevant activities

The EIT HEI portfolio is designed to build cumulative institutional capacity. New projects should demonstrate progression and additionality rather than simply repeating activities already implemented through previous EIT HEI projects or other initiatives.

Building on previous EIT HEI experience

Previous EIT HEI participants may apply, including previous consortium members, provided that the proposed project demonstrates clear additionality and is not simply a continuation or replication of a previously funded project. Where relevant, previous experience can be used to:

- Scale or institutionalise successful approaches.
- Address gaps identified through previous implementation.
- Apply existing approaches to new disciplines, target groups or institutional contexts.
- Connect previously separate activities or institutional capabilities.

- Develop more advanced institutional processes or structures.
- Transfer experience from more mature to less experienced HEIs.
- Strengthen or extend existing partnerships and ecosystem connections.

Previous EIT HEI beneficiaries are considered Innovation and Entrepreneurship Pioneers and are encouraged to contribute their experience, including through peer learning, knowledge sharing and mentoring.

Eligibility note: Organisations funded under EIT HEI Call 2025 and participating in an active Cohort 5 project are not eligible to participate as funded beneficiaries in Call 2026, as set out in the Call. Associated non-funded partners in Call 2025 are eligible. A full list of participating organisations in selected EIT HEI Call 2025 projects can be found in the list of supporting documents to this Call, and linked in the Call text.

Building on other initiatives

Projects may also build on relevant European, national, regional or institutional initiatives, programmes, strategies and investments. The proposal should explain:

- What existing capability or result is being built upon.
- What gap or opportunity the EIT HEI project addresses.
- What additional value the EIT HEI support provides.
- How duplication will be avoided.
- How results or capabilities will be connected or further developed.

The strongest proposals demonstrate a clear progression from existing capabilities towards a more integrated and sustainable institutional approach.

e. EIT HEI portfolio and Community integration and participation

The EIT HEI portfolio and Community provide opportunities for projects to learn from one another, access expertise and resources, and contribute to collective learning. Projects should approach participation as part of implementation rather than as an additional communication activity.

Community Officer

The Community Officer should act as the main coordination point for the project's participation in portfolio and Community activities. The role may be combined with another project role. The Officer should have sufficient knowledge of the project and authority to coordinate contributions across the consortium.

Responsibilities may include:

- Coordinating participation in portfolio-level activities.
- Maintaining an overview of Community commitments.
- Coordinating contributions from consortium partners.
- Identifying relevant knowledge, results and resources to share.
- Coordinating success stories and good-practice submissions.
- Maintaining communication with the EIT HEI management team.

Community Engagement Plan

The Community Engagement Plan should translate the Call requirements into a practical approach for the project. It should identify:

- The Community Officer and relevant roles.
- Planned participation in portfolio-level activities.
- Relevant Community contribution areas.
- Planned contributions and indicative timing.
- Expertise, results, resources and practices that may be shared.
- Relevant IP, confidentiality or data considerations.
- Staff time and other resources required.

The Plan should be proportionate to the project and may be updated as the project develops. During implementation, the EIT HEI management team will work with funded projects to agree the final contribution plan, taking into account the project's expertise, results and resources as well as wider portfolio needs.

Portfolio-level activities

Portfolio-level activities are designed to support common learning, capacity building and connections across Cohort 6. The programme may include:

- Methodological and thematic training.
- Collective learning and sensemaking.
- Expert support.
- Peer exchange.
- Networking.
- Connections to KICs and the wider EIT and European innovation ecosystem.

The activities listed in the Call indicate the planned programme. Dates, formats and participation requirements may be refined during implementation. Projects should plan participation at consortium level and ensure that relevant representatives can attend activities where participation is required or particularly relevant to implementation.

Contributions to the wider EIT HEI Community

Each project must contribute to at least two of the following three Community contribution areas. Projects do not need to identify specific contributions at application stage. Contributions will be agreed with the EIT HEI management team during implementation, taking into account project expertise and results, available resources and wider portfolio needs, and supporting a relevant and balanced portfolio of contributions.

Community contribution area	Examples	Possible formats
Community Events and Knowledge Exchange	Workshops and interactive sessions; project case studies or results presentations; Q&A sessions; speaker, panel or expert contributions; roundtables; peer-learning sessions; project showcases and other Community knowledge-sharing activities.	Live in-person or online events, where appropriate complemented by a recorded on-demand version.
Training and Learning Resources	Training sessions or workshops; existing training materials or learning resources; methodologies, curricula or other educational resources; expert or trainer contributions to Community learning activities.	Live or online training; text-based learning resources such as guidelines, handbooks or how-to materials.
Replicable Practices and Tools	Good practices and case studies; guidelines and frameworks; methodologies and tools; maps, databases or catalogues; templates and practical resources; models, approaches or other reusable project outputs.	Text-based or visual materials that can be shared, reused or adapted by other Community members.

The examples are indicative rather than exhaustive. Projects may propose other relevant activities and resources that provide value to the wider EIT HEI Community. Projects should consider transfer, reuse and adaptation when developing and documenting their contributions. Contributions must respect applicable intellectual property, confidentiality, personal data and other legal requirements.

Success stories and good practices

Each project must submit at least two success stories and two good practices through the EIT HEI Community platform during the funding period.

A success story should demonstrate a meaningful achievement resulting from project activities. It should explain what was achieved, for whom and why it is relevant.

A good practice should describe an approach, method, process or solution that has demonstrated value and has potential to be adapted or transferred to other contexts.

Projects should avoid treating these submissions as purely promotional outputs. They should provide sufficient information to enable learning and, where appropriate, transfer or replication.

f. Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)

MEL is an integral part of project implementation and should be embedded from the beginning rather than treated as an end-of-project reporting exercise. Projects should establish appropriate internal processes to:

- Monitor progress against approved objectives and Funded Actions.
- Track commitments and KPI achievement.
- Collect quantitative and qualitative evidence.
- Identify achievements, challenges and emerging results.
- Reflect on what is working and why.
- Identify approaches that may be transferable to other HEIs or contexts.
- Use evidence and learning to adapt implementation where appropriate.

Evidence of change

Projects should consider from the outset what evidence will demonstrate progress and change. Relevant evidence may include:

- Participation and activity data.
- Institutional policy or strategy changes.
- New or strengthened structures and processes.
- Curriculum or educational changes.
- New partnerships.
- Knowledge transfer or commercialisation activity.
- Examples of innovation and entrepreneurship outcomes.
- Stakeholder feedback.
- Qualitative accounts of institutional or ecosystem change.

Quantitative KPIs provide important evidence of progress but should be complemented by qualitative evidence and reflection where this is needed to understand institutional change. Projects will participate in EIT HEI portfolio-level

monitoring, review, reflection and learning activities during and at the end of implementation. Further requirements are set out in the EIT HEI MEL Framework and relevant annexes¹.

g. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), including gender equality, should be considered as a cross-cutting dimension of project design, implementation and governance. Projects should consider how DEI can strengthen:

- Access to innovation and entrepreneurship education and support.
- Participation and progression of diverse STEM talent.
- Institutional innovation and entrepreneurship practices.
- Leadership and decision-making.
- Partnerships and innovation ecosystems.
- The relevance and reach of project results.

DEI Value Statement and Action Plan

The DEI Value Statement and Action Plan forms part of the IVAP and should be integrated into the overall project approach rather than treated as a separate workstream. The Action Plan should set out the project's relevant DEI priorities and concrete measures, addressing, where relevant:

- Participation, progression and leadership of underrepresented groups, particularly women, in manufacturing-relevant STEM, entrepreneurship and deep-tech innovation.
- Inclusive approaches in education, training and support services.
- Inclusive leadership and organisational practices.
- Barriers to participation across diverse geographical, social and economic contexts, including barriers affecting widening countries or underrepresented regions.
- Inclusive partnerships with industry, research organisations, public authorities and regional and European innovation ecosystems.

Projects should define actions and responsibilities where appropriate and identify indicators or other evidence that can be used to assess progress. DEI measures should be proportionate to the project's context and integrated into relevant activities, institutional interventions, governance and partnerships. Projects should demonstrate how DEI contributes to sustainable institutional change and more inclusive ecosystems beyond the project lifetime. Progress and lessons learned should be reflected through the EIT HEI MEL process.

¹ [Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning \(MEL\) Framework](#)