

MINUTES OF MEETING: WG IGLO Innovation on Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP)

Date:	26 June 2024
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Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP)

The [regulation](#) took effect on 1 March 2024 and it is in line with the new EU Competitiveness Deal. It has been designed as Europe's response to serious competitive actions globally, focusing on securing strategic technologies essential for the twin transition (*digital and green*) and maintaining the EU's competitiveness. One of its main purposes is to enhance Europe's ability to scale up and commercialize innovations.

STEP aims to be efficient by using existing networks and processes, while improving coordination between different types of funds (*direct funds – e.g. EU4Health, Digital Europe, HEU with particular focus on EIC and the Innovation Fund, shared managed funds – e.g. Cohesion policy and shared managed funds indirect funds*). STEP targets three broad sectors: biotechnologies, digital technologies and clean and resource efficient technologies. Projects supported under STEP must meet two conditions: they must be innovative and/or help reduce the EU's strategic dependencies.

The initiative engages various stakeholders such as the European Commission, national managing authorities and partners. To implement the regulation, several new tools have been introduced. These include the [STEP Portal](#), the establishment of a STEP National Contact Points network and ongoing discussions between DG RTD and DG REGIO aimed at optimizing synergies between their respective Work Programmes and cohesion policy.

One of the key futures of the STEP is the STEP Seal (*Sovereignty Seal*), which applies for projects from the following EU programmes: Digital Europe, European Defence Fund, EU4Health, Horizon Europe and Innovation Fund, that meet the minimum quality requirements and contribute to STEP objectives. This allows projects that do not receive funding in one programme, due to budget limitations, to have access to other funding opportunities. Projects that are funded can also receive the Seal, allowing for broader coverage of their costs. Member States are encouraged, though not obligated, to consider supporting STEP Seal projects on their national level (*using e.g. ERDF, ESF or RRF*).

Started from January this year, several STEP calls have been closed: Horizon Europe – Pillar II Cluster 4 Space (2), Innovation Fund (5), Digital Europe (2). There are 15 open calls in the European Defence Fund and 3 in EU4Health.

STEP in European Innovation Council (EIC)

Under the STEP, the EIC will offer equity-only support through the EIC Fund, with investments between 10 million and 30 million EUR. Supported projects also receive access to EIC Business Acceleration Services and can earn STEP Seal. Supported activities include digital technologies and deep tech innovations, clean and resource-efficient technologies (including net-zero technologies) and biotechnologies. Eligibility for the EIC STEP call includes single companies that are SMEs or small mid-caps based in a Member States or Associated Countries to Horizon Europe programme.

The EIC STEP application process will include continuous open call. Projects will undergo a detailed eligibility check, ensuring they meet STEP criteria. They will be then assessed through jury interviews against specific criteria, potentially involving specialist jury for STEP evaluation.



The STEP Seal will play a dual role in supporting projects: proposals selected for funding receive the STEP Seal, which will help them access additional complementary funding. For proposals that meet the criteria but are not selected for funding, they will be awarded either the STEP Seal or Seal of Excellence, providing support to access alternative funding sources.

The interservice consultation on the EIC Step call is scheduled for July 2024, with adoption expected in September/October and the opening of the EIC STEP Scaleup Call planned for October/November.

