

ST&ER

Scaling **T**win **T**ransition in **T**ourism by harnessing the
Experience **E**conomy for greater **R**esilience



Deliverable 3.2:

**Open Call for Submission of Individual or
Collaborative Projects of tourism SMEs
under the ST&ER Project.**

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the European Union**



Disclaimer

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1. Background and Summary of the ST3ER Project

ST3ER (www.st3er.eu) is a 3-year Project (September 2023–August 2026) with an overall budget of €3.1m and is co-funded by the European Union to enhance the competitiveness and resilience of tourism SMEs. The main objectives of the ST3ER Project are to facilitate tourism SMEs in the project partner regions in green and digital transition, in building capacity, in development/scaling up, in fostering innovative solutions for sustainable tourism (new business models, innovative services, heightened resilience) and in promoting best practice exchanges, knowledge sharing and transfer.

The ST3ER Project partners are:

- Údarás na Gaeltachta, Ireland (Co-ordinator)¹
- WestBic, Ireland
- UPTec – Associação de Transferência de Tecnologia da Asprela, Portugal
- Fundacion Bahía de Cádiz para el Desarrollo Economico, Spain
- Razvojni Center Srca Slovenije d.o.o., Slovenia²
- Founden Creative Business CUP, Denmark

Only SMEs in the partner countries / administrative regions will be eligible to participate. (Please see footnotes 1 & 2 for relevant geographic project regions in Ireland and Slovenia).

A total of 1.960.000€ in grants will be provided directly to circa 72 innovative projects implemented by tourism SMEs and start-ups. In this first call, approximately 56 projects will be supported, and a further c.16 projects will be accepted in a second call to focus on start-ups in Spring 2025.

2. SME Call for Innovative Projects

Do you wish your tourism-oriented business to be a leader in the twin (digital and green) transition? Then join ST3ER Project to be part of a multi-cultural network and receive the support you need.

ST3ER is an impactful, multi-faceted programme focusing on encouraging innovation within tourism SMEs³, to help boost their resilience and foster sustainability, while simultaneously supporting the achievement of European twin transition goals.

ST3ER will provide access to finance, mentoring, training and learning opportunities, business support resources to successful applicants, as well as new connections and co-creation opportunities with other relevant stakeholders.

2.1 Call for Projects

¹ Applicant SMEs must be operating in a Gaeltacht region within Cork, Donegal, Galway, Kerry, Meath, Mayo, and Waterford

² Must be based in the operational area of the Heart of Slovenia Local Action Group namely the municipalities of Dol pri Ljubljani, Kamnik, Litija, Lukovica, Moravče, and Šmartno pri Litiji.

³ Applicant SMEs will have to demonstrate that they are genuinely operating in the tourism sector; please see detail on NACE codes in section 2.4.



ST3ER now invites innovative digital and / or green projects, led by ambitious experiential tourism-oriented SMEs in the project partner regions under the following two categories:

- Individual SME Innovation Projects with a support of a €25,000 grant / each - Specifically aimed at tourism-oriented SMEs whose focus is on innovative responses to the thematic twin transition challenges of digital and green;
- Collaborative Innovation Projects involving a partnership with a minimum of 2 and a maximum of 4 tourism SMEs with the support of a €30,000 grant / project - targeting experimental (innovative) carbon footprint reduction measures or any of the green practices listed below in Table 1.

Individual Innovation Projects should include a minimum of one digital or green practice from Table 1 below; for Collaborative Innovation Projects, a minimum of one green practice is mandatory, and can also be combined with a digital practice if relevant.

Table 1:

Digital practices	Green practices
Artificial Intelligence,	Developing a Biodiversity action plan
Augmented and Virtual Reality,	Carbon Foot printing and carbon reduction
Big Data and Data Analytics,	Circular Economy thinking and transition to circular economy business models/ Waste prevention/recycling
Blockchain,	Climate Adaptation
Cloud Computing	Environmental Management System
Internet of Things,	Green Procurement
Other digital practices related to tourism.	Life Cycle Assessment
	Sustainability Benchmarking
	Sustainable Logistics
	Sustainable Packaging
	Sustainable strategy including Renewable technology/Energy efficiencies strategy
	Other green practices related to tourism

As detailed in Section 3 below, applicants must clearly describe and demonstrate the innovative aspect(s) of their proposed project at submission stage, showing clearly how the project will contribute to innovating the offer in the tourism ecosystem.

Both categories of innovative projects need to go a step further than simply buying greening/digital products off the shelf. Any products, software, tools, equipment and/or technological solutions proposed for funding within an SME's proposal needs to be central to the application of the proposed project, and should be essential in facilitating the innovative growth of the SMEs through the project, rather than simply applying tried and tested, more generic measures. Further detail on financial support, eligible expenditure etc. is provided in Section 5.

Choosing to propose a Collaborative Project provides an opportunity to tap into the knowledge base of other SMEs, to test disruptive ideas and capitalise on the benefits of the interactions of all parties on a partnership basis.

Examples of innovative projects to facilitate the idea generation of a suitable project submission are available here. ([link 1](#))



2.2 Financial supports

The ST3ER financial support will cover the full cost of implementation of the innovative project – SMEs will not be required to provide co-funding up to the budget indicated in Section 2.1. Financial support will be disbursed to the successful SMEs in the form of a lump sum, provided in stages as follows:

- 20% prepayment;
- 30% payment at mid-term; and
- 50% final payment at end of project upon full implementation of the Innovation Project.

The second and third payments will be made on foot of satisfactory technical progress reviews and evaluations. A technical report and a financial report will be needed at each stage, and the necessary templates will be made available before the signature of the Grant Agreement.

Financial support will be disbursed to the applying SME, which in turn must pay the mentors/experts, and the collaborative partner(s) in the case of Collaborative Innovation Projects. Expenses related to the participation at the mandatory events and modules must be paid from the grant received.

2.3 Other supports and requirements

In addition to the financial grant awards detailed above, the following supports will be provided to SMEs selected under this call.

- Mentoring: engaging in a bespoke 30-hour programme of 1:1 advice in agreed areas of expertise over the 9-12 months duration of their project implementation will be a mandatory requirement. SMEs will select their mentor(s) from a pool which has been established specifically for the ST3ER programme. In some cases, more than one mentor may be chosen by the SME, depending on the specific support required. The SME will be responsible for paying their mentor(s) for their services from the grant support.
- Selected SMEs will be required to attend at least 3 out of 6 knowledge/capacity building modules which will be provided, free of charge and online, by the ST3ER Project.
- SMEs will be encouraged to participate in all events organised by the ST3ER consortium, such as deep dives, cross-sectoral huddles, bootcamps and forums, as described here ([link 2](#))
- SMEs must attend at least one physical, on-site ST3ER event (in Cádiz, Spain; Slovenia or Denmark) within the duration of their Innovation Project, bringing added opportunities for engagement between SMEs, e.g exchange of best practices.
- SMEs selected will be required to become a member of the ST3ER online community bringing further opportunities for information exchange and collaboration with partners across the regions.

The programme of above events is currently being planned and a draft timetable is available here ([link 3](#)). Additional online and physical events may be added to this inventory; SMEs may also participate in other external events (not organised by the ST3ER project) as part of their project commitment if they are relevant to the scope of this Call and agreed in advance with the ST3ER project consortium partners, with costs to be covered by the financial support.

2.4 Project promoter and collaborative partner structural requirements

This call is open to SMEs as defined by the EU Commission⁴ in the tourism sector, operating in the project partner regions as detailed in footnotes 1 and 2 on page 4 above. An indicative but non-exhaustive list of relevant tourism NACE codes to which applicant SMEs should be aligned is set out here ([link 4](#)).

⁴ [Commission Recommendation of 6 May 2003 concerning the definition of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises](#)



For Collaborative Innovation Projects

- A partnership comprising a minimum of 2 tourism SMEs and a maximum of 4 tourism SMEs is required.
- A collaborative partner can participate in only one project within this call.
- Partnerships may pre-exist or be newly established partnerships.
- Partnerships shall be composed of SMEs based in the same country.

2.5 Summary

Table 2 below summarises the important aspects of the two types of projects within this Open Call.

Table 2:

GENERAL OPEN CALL INFORMATION		
Project	Scaling Twin Transition in Tourism by harnessing the Experience Economy for greater Resilience (ST3ER)	
Funding Source	Single Market Programme (SMP COSME)	
Budget for Open Calls in 2024/2025	1.960.000€	
Open Call 2024	Individual Innovation Projects	Collaborative Innovation Projects
Number of applicant SMEs	Maximum 1	2 to 4
Financial support	€25 000	€30 000
Funding rate	100%	
Mandatory mentoring hours	Minimum 30 hours	
Participation on knowledge/capacity building modules	3 out of 6	
Participation on ST3ER Project physical events	Minimum 1	
Participation in on-line community network	Mandatory registration	
Required agreements	Grant Agreement	Grant Agreement and Cooperation Agreement

2.6 Anticipated breakdown of support

As detailed in table 3 below, it is envisaged that 40 Individual SME Innovation Projects alongside 16 Collaborative Innovation projects will be selected for support in this first call for SMEs.

Table 3:

	Individual Innovation Projects	Collaborative Innovation Projects
Denmark	4-8	1-5
Ireland	6-10	1-5
Portugal	7-11	1-5
Slovenia	3-7	1-5
Spain	10-14	2-6
Total ⁵	40	16

⁵ As per the [EISMEA Call document \(SMP-COSME-2022-TOURSME\)](#), the final number of Innovation Projects from Call 1 and Call 2 per country must not be less than nine innovative projects.



These are indicative numbers per country. ST3ER Project reserves the right to adjust innovative projects distribution, either Individual Projects or Collaborative Projects, among participating countries, depending on the number of successful applications.

3. Application Procedure

- Applications will only be accepted via [this online form](#) (hyperlink to form); submissions by any other means (e-mail or other) will not be considered. The structure and content of the application form is available here ([Link 5](#)) for information / preparation purposes only.
- Only one application per SME (either Individual or Collaborative), will be accepted. Where an SME submits more than one application, only the last one received will be considered.
- Applications should be completed and submitted in English or Irish.
- Applications will only be accepted from SMEs up until 23:59 CET of 30th September 2024. Any extension to this closing date will be publicly promoted.
- All information provided will be treated confidentially and stored only for the purpose of this call.⁶
- Once an application is received, an automatic email will be sent to confirm that the application was received.
- The applicant must be contactable throughout the process for any clarification purposes arising.

4. Admission Requirements of Projects

For their application to be considered valid, an applicant must comply with the following requirements:

- Fully complete all fields in the application form.
- Qualify as a tourism Small or Medium Enterprise / SME⁷.
Natural persons are not eligible to participate except in the case of sole traders, where the trading entity does not have legal personality separate from that of the individual.
- Be registered in one of the following countries:
 - Denmark
 - Ireland⁸
 - Portugal
 - Slovenia⁹
 - Spainand submit proof of registration at the corresponding national/regional chamber of commerce, tax authority, or equivalent.
- Provide proof of full compliance with national tax and social security obligations.
- Agree with the processing of their personal data in accordance with Údarás na Gaeltachta's privacy policy¹⁰, and to share personal data with the ST3ER Project consortium and EISMEA (This applies also to collaborative partners).
- Have appropriate working knowledge of English.

⁶ Please see privacy policy link in footnote 10.

⁷ [Commission Recommendation of 6 May 2003 concerning the definition of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises](#)

⁸ Applicant SMEs must be operating in a Gaeltacht region within Cork, Donegal, Galway, Kerry, Meath, Mayo, and Waterford.

⁹ Must be based in the operational area of the Heart of Slovenia Local Action Group namely the municipalities of Dol pri Ljubljani, Kamnik, Litija, Lukovica, Moravče, and Šmartno pri Litiji.

¹⁰ <https://udaras.ie/en/privacy-statement/>



- Demonstrate that they are operating in the tourism sector, under one of the NACE codes listed here ([link 4](#)), or other as appropriate.
- Propose an innovative project, complying with the requirements set out in section 2 above, which will take 9-12 months to complete.
- Agree to use the financial support provided only for the implementation of the proposed project.
- Agree to comply with the reporting requirements of the ST3ER Project.

All applicants will be informed by email whether their application will proceed to the evaluation stage or not within a month of the closing date for applications.

A list of reasons for exclusion from participation beyond these basic admission requirements is available here ([Link 6](#))

5. Costs' eligibility and use of the financial support

5.1 Scope of financial support

The ST3ER financial support will cover the full cost of implementation of the innovative project – SMEs will not be required to provide co-funding up to the budget indicated in Section 2.1.

5.2 Eligible costs

The costs incurred on the Innovation Project should fall within the eligible categories as set out in Table 4 below. This financial support should be used to purchase goods and services that will contribute in an instrumental way to the development of the approved innovative digital or green project. It cannot be used simply to purchase stand alone, off-the-shelf products or solutions. The grant shall be used to engage in innovative solutions that will stimulate business growth and resilience concerning the digital and/or green transition.

While certain categories of expenditure have indicative ranges attached; the final values agreed may differ, provided that such is explained and is clearly necessary due to the innovative aspect of the project.

All proposed purchases must be detailed in the budget submitted as part of the application, and only those agreed as part of the Grant Agreement, after any negotiations between ST3ER and the applicant SME, will be deemed eligible.

Table 4

Cost Category	Description	Proportion of grant
Travel and subsistence	costs to participate in ST3ER physical events	0% - 15% of the grant (indicative proportion)
Mentoring services	advisory services in accordance with the mandatory mentoring programme	0% - 10% of the grant (indicative proportion)



Consultancy services	Including e.g. product development; market studies; development and analysis of business plans; intellectual property development; training; transition processes including EMAS registration and/or EU Ecolabel/other recognised certification schemes	
Advertising, promotion, and communication	designing communication and awareness raising campaigns and activities, inc. social media	
Equipment or software	Including software licenses, installation, use of sustainability impact monitoring equipment / software to encourage green and digital transition	0% - 15% (maximum) of the grant
Tools and/or Technology Solutions:	Essential tangible assets that contribute to the successful delivery of the innovative solution detailed in the project application, e.g. energy-efficient devices, energy management systems, or waste reduction equipment	0% - 20% (maximum) of the grant

5.3 General principles

SMEs must adhere to relevant legislation and best practices relating to the financial management of grant support provided under ST3ER, including the regulations regarding the procurement of goods and services applicable in their own country. ST3ER reserves the right to ask SMEs for proof of such procedures being followed.

Services can be procured from any EU Member State, and countries associated with the COSME part of the SMP (i.e., procurement is not confined to the five countries represented in the ST3ER consortium).

Deductible VAT is an ineligible cost, as it is recoverable under national VAT systems. In such cases, the SME should include the ex-VAT cost in their application budget, for evaluation purposes, and in subsequent financial reports should include ex-VAT and VAT inclusive costs. However, if VAT is NOT deductible, it is an eligible cost and the full price of the goods or services bought by the beneficiary could be recorded as expenditure and submitted to ST3ER.

Paid mentoring / consultancy /other services cannot be procured from members of the ST3ER consortium or from any persons having powers of representation within the SME proposing a successful Innovation Project. For Collaborative Projects, the mentor(s) / consultant(s) /other service providers cannot be affiliated with any of the partners listed in the Cooperation Agreement.

ST3ER Project reserves the right to make budget adjustments during the negotiation process with the selected SMEs.

A sample budget breakdown is given here. ([Link 7](#))



6. Evaluation criteria of the projects

Evaluation of each innovative project proposal will be undertaken by three members of ST3ER consortium. To ensure transparency and accountability, partners will not evaluate applications from their own countries.

The evaluation will be based on five main criteria.

1. **Innovative approach:** clearly demonstrates the innovative aspects of the digitalisation/green proposal and how these will add value to their current business model and contribute to innovating the offer in the tourism ecosystem. (40 marks available)
2. **Enterprise viability:** demonstrate a discernible competitive advantage, be financially and commercially viable, possess the management and financial resources to absorb project intervention. (10 marks available)
3. **Excellence:** Proposals should clearly demonstrate that the project reflects the SME management strategy and vision. Additionally, the expected output of the project adds to the digitalisation, / green sustainability and competitiveness of the business. (10 marks available)
4. **Relevance:** the proposal implements solutions to the identified challenges of each specific Innovative Project topic and the added value of the project to the ST3ER network. (20 marks available)
5. **Implementation of the Project:** Highlights attainable and realistic goals that align with the established timeframe, making efficient use of the resources provided by the ST3ER Project. The financial support is used with the principles of cost-effectiveness. (20 marks available)

A minimum of 40% of the total mark for each criterion must be reached; failing to meet that threshold will result in the proposal being disqualified.

Applications will be chosen according to the highest evaluation scores, having regard to the geographic distribution of projects detailed in section 2.6 above, and the requirement that each country will have a minimum of nine innovative projects developed under ST3ER.

In case of a tie, the subsequent rules apply:

- **Tiebreaker 1:** Where two or more applications have the same final score, priority will be given to the application with the highest score on criterion 1, "Innovative Approach".
- **Tiebreaker 2:** Where two or more applications have the same final score, and the same score for criterion 1, "Innovative Approach", priority will be given to the application with the highest score for on criterion 5, "Implementation of the Project".

Applicants will be informed about the decision regarding their project within 6 weeks of the submission deadline.

Projects not selected for funding, but that meet the minimum threshold, will be put on a reserve list, and may subsequently be invited to participate if a selected SME with higher ranking does not choose to participate, or continue with the project.

7. Post evaluation



After the evaluation process is concluded, and the selected applicants have been notified, the following procedure will take place:

7.1 Negotiation and grant agreement finalisation

- The ST3ER consortium will start the Grant Agreement preparation in collaboration with the selected SMEs. Case by case, and based on the evaluation feedback, a contract negotiation process which may include budget and / or output, expected results adjustments will be conducted.
- At the end of the negotiation phase, the SME will have 15 calendar days to accept and sign the Agreement. Therefore, the following scenarios might apply:
 - The SME accepts and sends the signed Agreement on time: the execution of the action plan starts, a proof of agreement for mentoring services (including cost breakdown) is submitted and the first payment/transfer of 20% of the grant is made.
 - The SME refuses the Agreement or does not return it signed within 15 calendar days: the SME is automatically excluded and the next highest scoring SME from the reserve list will be contacted to start the post admission procedure.
- For Collaborative Innovation Projects, the applicant SME will have to submit the Cooperation Agreement at the same time as the Grant Agreement is finalised. An additional 15-calendar days can be given, if necessary, for this step to be taken. First payment/transfer will only be processed once the following documents are submitted: signed Grant Agreement, Cooperation Agreement, and proof of agreement for mentoring services (including cost breakdown). Failing to submit any of these documents will exclude the project.
- The signed Grant Agreement fulfils the legal requirements between the ST3ER consortium and the beneficiaries.
- The SMEs selected will be required to become a member of the ST3ER online community (My Creative Networks). At least one representative of the SME will be required to set up a profile.

7.2 General principles

Throughout the project's duration, the selected applicant SMEs will agree to:

- Implement its agreed action plan in accordance with the provisions of the Grant Agreement and the rules and requirements of this call.
- Comply with all relevant national legislation and regulation.
- Designate a contact person for the duration of the action plan;
- Supply any information requested to assist the ST3ER consortium in verifying the proper management of the agreed project plan. This information may be shared with the European Commission.

7.3 Repayment of grant support

Financial support provided by ST3ER will have to be promptly paid back to the consortium in the event that the innovative project is not being implemented in line with the agreed action plan, timeline and grant agreement. Some examples of complete or partial refund of financial support received include:



- SME signs the grant agreement but after receiving the pre-financing decides not to proceed with their project, the SME will need to fully reimburse the entire amount of the pre-financing received.
- SME completes some activities but not all the budgeted ones, the SME will need to return the additional funds received and will not receive the final payment.
- SME fails to supply required information, interim reports, supporting documents regarding the implementation of the project plan as detailed in the Grant Agreement in full and on time, the SME will need to fully reimburse the entire amount of financing received.
- SME completes all the activities but does not present the final project and financial report on time (without justified advance extension), the SME will need to fully reimburse the entire amount of financing received.

Please, be aware that the above list is not exhaustive. ST3ER reserves the right to take legal action in cases of lack of compliance of the Grant Agreement on the part of an SME.

8. Timetable and contact data

Below are the contacts from each consortium member who can be contacted with queries in relation to project applications.

- Ireland, Údaras na Gaeltacha
Fionnán Ó Hogáin, st3er@udaras.ie
- WestBic, Ireland
Eunan Cunningham, ecunningham@westbic.ie
- Portugal, UPTec – Associação de Transferência de Tecnologia da Asprela
Rita Reis, rreis@uptec.up.pt
- Spain, Fundacion Bahía de Cádiz para el Desarrollo Economico
Ana Suárez Lena, asuarez@ceeicadiz.com
- Slovenia, Razvojni Center Srca Slovenije, d.o.o.
Mojca Štepic, mojca.stepic@razvoj.si
- Denmark, Fonden Creative Business Cup (CBN)
Catarina Reis, car@cbnet.com

The following timetable provides SMEs with a timeline of the different stages of the ST3ER Project.

Application Form	
Phases	Dates
Dissemination and opening of the call for the submission of Innovation Projects	1 st of July 2024



Eligible Countries	Ireland (Applicant SMEs must be operating in a Gaeltacht region in Cork, Donegal, Galway, Kerry, Meath, Mayo, and Waterford). Portugal Spain Denmark Slovenia (applicant SMEs must be based in the operational area of the Heart of Slovenia Local Action Group namely the municipalities of Dol pri Ljubljani, Kamnik, Litija, Lukovica, Moravče, and Šmartno pri Litiji).
Deadline for submission of Innovation Projects	3 months after the opening of the call
Communication regarding eligibility, proceed further to evaluation	Within a month of the deadline for submission
Communication of evaluation results	6 weeks after the call ends
Launch of the Innovation Projects	Flexible, but no later than 1 st of December 2024
First payment of 20% of total financial support	After signing of the necessary documents and submission of a proof of agreement for mentoring services (including cost breakdown)
Launch of the mentoring process	Up to 1 month after the launch of the projects, approx. January 2025
Second payment of 30% of total financial support	Mid-term of the Innovation Project, upon provision of satisfactory technical and financial reports
Third and last payment of 50% of total financial support	Last month of the Innovation Project and upon provision of satisfactory final project report and financial report
End of the mentoring process	End of the respective Innovation Project (as agreed individually with the mentors)
End of the Innovation Project	Between 9 to 12 months after project initiation



ST&ER

Partners:

UPTEC SCIENCE AND
TECHNOLOGY PARK
OF UNIVERSITY
OF PORTO



**Údarás na
Gaeltachta**



**RAZVOJNI CENTER
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