

Reference: ESA Phi-Lab Ireland Starting FAQ Document – Issue 1.1, 07/07/2025

GENERAL QUESTIONS

How much funding is available?

Proposals are accepted to a maximum value of €400,000 of innovation seed funding, complemented with access to state-of-the-art equipment and instrumentation at IMR and AMBER Centre at Trinity College Dublin, access to office space (if required), and business support and mentorship.

Funding is available at different rates depending on the entity type. SMEs are funded to a maximum of 80% of the total allowable cost of the activity, and MNCs are funded to a maximum of 50% of the total allowable cost of the activity. Universities and research institutions, involved as subcontractors in a consortium, are eligible to funding up to 100% of the total allowable cost of the activity, dependent on additional criteria set out in the *Open Call Document*. Further clarification and advice can be sought from the ESA Phi-Lab Ireland Helpdesk at info@esaphilab.ie.

What is the difference between ESA Phi-Lab Ireland and the ESA BIC Program?

ESA Phi-Lab NET (the pan-European network of Phi-Labs) intends to bridge the gap between research and commercialisation. ESA Phi-Lab Ireland has a strong focus on disruptive innovation and commercialisation of space-optimised hardware. ESA Phi-Lab Ireland supports projects from established economic operators, proposing innovative science and technologies with high commercial potential. In contrast, the ESA BIC programme addresses start-ups only, and focuses on company development.

How long can projects be funded?

Projects can be funded up to a maximum of 24 months.

Will the funding be subject to De Minimis State Aid?

Funding provided by ESA Phi-Lab Ireland takes the form of Contracted Research, and therefore does not constitute De Minimis State Aid.

Is the funding equity-free?

Yes. The ownership of all Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) created by the beneficiaries, via the ESA Phi-Lab Ireland funding, will remain with the beneficiaries. Results are owned by the Party that generates them. A Sub-Grant Agreement (if required) will introduce provisions concerning joint ownership of the results of the sub-granted projects.

Does benefiting from ESA Phi-Lab Ireland entitle ESA or ESA Phi-Lab Ireland to beneficiary background IP?

No. Beneficiary background IP is specified in the *Draft Research Contract*, and there will be no claim on background IP from ESA or ESA Phi-Lab Ireland.

Is the funding limited to space-only applications?

No. While all proposals must demonstrate a valid space connection, this includes terrestrial technologies with potential future applications in space, or space-optimised hardware that might find a new use with terrestrial impact (e.g. Aerospace, Robotics, MedTech). Proposals must also meet the specific focus of competence of ESA Phi-Lab Ireland.

Can we collaborate with entities outside Ireland?

Yes. However, when acting in collaboration with other foreign entities, the proportion of the total project costs allocated to Irish entity(ies) must be greater than or equal to 70%.

Can we use the funding to develop a prototype or demonstrator?

Yes. Development of functional prototypes or demonstrators is encouraged, particularly where they support validation of innovative concepts with potential for commercial or mission validation.

Is the funding suitable for start-ups or early-stage companies?

Yes. While the ESA BIC programme is designed specifically for start-ups, ESA Phi-Lab Ireland is open to early-stage companies with a clear technology focus and commercial ambition. However, start-ups are especially encouraged to demonstrate and highlight in their application how they meet the requirements of the “Background and Experience” evaluation criteria in Table 3 of the Open Call Document.

APPLICATION

Who can apply?

The research project proposal must be submitted by (a team part of) a legal entity or a consortium of legal entities, established in an ESA Member State(s). These are hereafter referred to as “economic operators”. Economic operators include SMEs, universities and research institutions, and MNCs. Where an Applicant is a university or research institution, applications can solely be made as part of a consortium which includes one or more private company partners. Additionally, universities and research institutions cannot be the Lead Applicant.

Applicants must demonstrate that the research activity can deliver a benefit to the ESA Phi-Lab Ireland, and has a valid space connection.

How to apply to the ESA Phi-Lab Ireland Open Call (2025)?

A collection of the relevant and necessary documentation required to apply to the ESA Phi-Lab Ireland Open Call 2025 can be found [here](#). Applicants are advised to carefully read all of the documentation, and where necessary, ensure the proposal complies with the criteria set out by the European Space Agency and Phi-Lab Ireland. Applicants are invited to first carefully read the *Open Call Document*.

Applicants wishing to avail of the “Pre-Proposal Guidance” opportunity are advised to complete the Expression of Interest Form in advance of the 25 July 2025 deadline.

What is the *Expression of Interest Form*, and what is the “Pre-Proposal Guidance” Opportunity?

Applicants wishing to avail of the “Pre-Proposal Guidance” opportunity are invited to complete a short Expression of Interest Form supplied at www.esaphilab.ie. The *Expression of Interest Form* is intended to facilitate an initial assessment of your application and your interest in ESA Phi-Lab Ireland.

The assessment will be carried out by staff members of IMR and AMBER Centre at Trinity College Dublin, and your application will be assigned a traffic light score (green, orange, red), with the scores designed to determine the suitability of the project for the Open Call.

Expressions of Interest scoring Green and Orange will be assisted to prepare their applications in a “Pre-Proposal Guidance” phase, with Applicants given access to limited administration and technical support. Expressions of Interest scoring Red will be advised to not submit an application to the Open Call, and will be provided with possible “Next Steps”, including advice on strengthening their applications for later Open Calls

in 2026 and beyond. However, no Applicant will be prevented from applying to the Open Call should they wish to do so.

Is ESA Phi-Lab Ireland the right place for my project? Is my project a good fit?

In addition to complying with the general criteria, Applicants must ensure that their research project aligns with one or more of the specific topics contained in the Open Call Document (Advanced Materials Research, Design Optimisation, Additive Manufacturing, Structural Analysis and Simulation, Optimisation of Production Processes, and Integration of Smart Materials). The project must also demonstrate high commercial potential. Applicants wishing to avail of the “Pre-Proposal Guidance” opportunity are advised to complete the Expression of Interest Form in advance of the 25 July 2025 deadline.

Applicants are welcome to submit questions at any time to the ESA Phi-Lab Ireland Helpdesk at info@esaphilab.ie, or can request this clarification through the “Pre-Proposal Guidance” opportunity (through the Expression of Interest Form) in advance of the 25 July 2025 deadline.

Is there a deadline to request “Pre-Proposal Guidance”?

Yes. Applicants must submit their Expression of Interest Form to info@esaphilab.ie in advance of the deadline on 25 July 2025 to avail of the “Pre-Proposal Guidance” opportunity.

What can the funding be used for? Which costs are eligible?

All costs must be necessary to the execution of the project. A detailed list of eligible costs is included in the *Open Call Document*. Costs not included in the eligible categories in the Open Call Document, but are deemed critical by the Applicant to the successful execution of the project should be agreed in advance with the ESA Phi-Lab Ireland Manager.

All costs must be included without VAT.

Can we reapply if unsuccessful in a previous open call?

Yes. Applicants who are not successful in this Open Call (2025) are encouraged to reapply with revised or strengthened proposals in 2026 and beyond. ESA Phi-Lab Ireland intends to provide feedback to assist interested parties engage with future Open Calls.

EVALUATION

What does the evaluation process look like? What is the Tender Evaluation Board (TEB)?

The Open Call (2025) evaluation procedure is carried out in two stages:

First stage: The Tender Opening Board (TOB) takes place after the submission deadline is closed and it assesses if all formal requirements have been met. This is a very important step to remain in the application process.

Second stage: The Tender Evaluation Board (TEB) meeting takes place after the TOB to evaluate the submitted documents and the Applicants performance at a pitch (10-15 minutes) and Q&A session (up to 30 minutes). The TEB evaluates each of the applicants against the evaluation criteria contained in the *Open Call Document*, and decides whether or not the Applicant(s) will be invited to sign a contract. Irish Manufacturing Research (IMR) and ESA manage the TEB. The TEB meeting usually takes place about a month after the submission deadline, and is envisaged to take place in-person at IMR Mullingar. Applicants will be notified of the results of the TEB shortly afterwards.

What are the evaluation criteria for the Tender Evaluation Board (TEB)?

The criteria used by the TEB to evaluate projects submitted to the Open Call (2025) are included in Table 3 of the *Open Call Document*. The criteria, and their respective weighting factors are Background and Experience (25%), Research and Technology Developments (30%), Commercial Opportunities and Potential Socio-economic Impact (25%), and Activity and Management Proposal (20%).

If an application is accepted, how long does it take to sign a contract with ESA Phi-Lab Ireland?

After approval from the TEB, the Applicant will be invited to a Contract Signing Meeting with ESA Phi-Lab Ireland. This is expected to take place within a few weeks of the completion of the TEB. This may be delayed due to external factors including any successful Applicant providing any required information (e.g. tax compliance, etc.)

How many projects does ESA Phi-Lab Ireland expect to fund in this Open Call (2025)?

While there are no constraints on the number of projects that may be evaluated by the Tender Evaluation Board (TEB), ESA Phi-Lab Ireland expects to be able to fund one to two projects in this Open Call (2025). Exact dates for the Tender Evaluation Board (TEB) will be made available later this year on www.esaphilab.ie, and will be communicated by email to Applicants.

MISCELLANEOUS

Do beneficiaries of ESA Phi-Lab Ireland funding have communication obligations?

Yes. Any communication or publication of the beneficiaries of ESA Phi-Lab Ireland shall clearly indicate that the project has received funding from the ESA Phi-Lab programme, therefore displaying the ESA Phi-Lab Ireland logo on all printed and digital material, including websites and press releases. Moreover, beneficiaries will agree that certain information regarding the projects selected for funding can be used by ESA Phi-Lab consortium for communication purposes.

What assets are available from IMR and AMBER Centre at Trinity College Dublin as part of ESA Phi-Lab Ireland?

ESA Phi-Lab Ireland operates from two of best equipped State-of-the-Art research centres in Ireland, in IMR and the AMBER Centre at Trinity College Dublin, both staffed by personnel highly skilled in the equipment's operation and the associated technical domain.

Applicants to the Open Call (2025) can avail of a comprehensive suite of equipment, facilities, and software, with some of the main categories summarised below. Applicants wishing to discuss the complete suite available should complete the *Expression of Interest Form* in advance of the 25 July 2025 deadline.

- Additive Manufacturing Equipment
- Subtractive Machining
- Cleanroom-based Thin Film Deposition and Patterning
- Post Processing
- Inspection and Metrology
- Materials Characterisation and Failure Analysis

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