

Call for proposals for SMEs and Startups



CONTENT

- 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**
- 2. INTRODUCTION**
- 3. WHO ARE WE**
- 4. INDICATIVE CHALLENGES AND TOPICS**
- 5. FINANCIAL SUPPORT**
- 6. HOW IT WORKS**
- 7. WHO CAN APPLY**
- 8. HOW TO SUBMIT A PROPOSAL**
- 9. ELIGIBLE COSTS**
- 10. EVALUATION PROCESS**
- 11. FORMALIZATION OF THE PARTICIPATION**

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document outlines the requirements and details of the Call for Proposals supported by the GATE5.0 project consortium and funded by the European Union under the Single Market Programme (SMP). The call targets innovative SMEs and startups in the agrifood ecosystem, with the objective of accelerating the adoption of green and digital technologies across European agrifood value chains.

Applicants must participate as consortia composed of one Agrifood SME and one Digital/Deep-tech SME, jointly developing a solution that addresses real challenges within the sector.

Each SME within the selected consortium will receive up to EUR 59,250 in financial support. As each project must be submitted by a consortium composed of one Agrifood SME and one Technology SME, the total maximum funding per consortium project amounts to EUR 118,500 (EUR 59,250 per SME), including business support services delivered through the GATE5.0 Academy.

The call supports projects addressing priority challenges such as water management, labour and smart productivity, reduction of crop protection inputs, soil health and crop optimisation, and data interoperability and governance, among others. Proposed solutions may include AI and data-driven systems, IoT, automation and robotics, sustainability and resource efficiency technologies, smart processing and traceability, with a strong focus on developing and validating market-oriented solutions.

GATE5.0 aims to strengthen cross-border collaboration, scale innovative agrifood technologies, and accelerate the sustainability and digital transformation of the EU agrifood ecosystem.



2. INTRODUCTION

This Call for Proposals is supported by the GATE5.0 project consortium and is financed by the EU's Single Market Programme (SMP) under Grant Agreement 101236973.

The call is addressed to innovative **SMEs and startups operating across the agrifood value chain** and aims to accelerate the emergence of new cross-border and cross-regional innovation pathways by fostering collaboration between SMEs, corporates, farmers, technology providers, clusters, and other key ecosystem actors. Through this initiative, GATE5.0 seeks to boost the adoption of Agriculture 5.0 solutions, contributing to more sustainable, efficient, and digitally enabled food systems across Europe.



The selected SMEs will receive up to EUR 59,250 in support, combining EUR 49,750 for project development and EUR 9,500 in business support services — including training workshops, mentoring, and matchmaking activities — to help them advance their solutions toward a market-ready, pilot-tested product or service.

2.1. WHAT IS GATE5.0?

The project “Green and Digital Transitions for a Sustainable European Agrifood Ecosystem” – GATE5.0 (SMP-COSME-2024-CLUSTER-01) implements a comprehensive and structured approach to accelerate the green and digital transformation of the European agrifood sector, positioning it at the forefront of innovation in alignment with the EU Green Deal and the Farm to Fork Strategy.

GATE5.0 empowers SMEs to develop, validate and scale innovative AgriTech solutions by integrating advanced Agriculture 5.0 technologies, including Artificial Intelligence, Internet of Things, robotics, precision farming and data-driven systems, addressing key sustainability challenges, optimising resource efficiency, reducing environmental impact and strengthening climate resilience.

Through a three-phase innovation funnel (Seed, Sprout, Harvest), the project guides SMEs from early-stage concepts to real-world market deployment, combining Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP), a tailored Acceleration Programme, and targeted Capacity Building services, ensuring that participating companies receive the technological, business and regulatory support required to achieve market and cross-border success, with dedicated project support for internationalisation actions.



GATE5.0 launches an Open Call for SMEs to join its Acceleration Programme and business support activities.

Selected SMEs will receive:

- Up to EUR 59,250 in total support
 - EUR 49,750 for project development
 - EUR 9,500 in business support services, including training workshops, mentoring and matchmaking
- Access to the full GATE5.0 support framework, designed to help transform innovative ideas into market-ready, pilot-tested products or services.

2. 2. MISSION AND MOTIVATION OF THE CALL

The mission of **GATE5.0** is to establish a coherent and high-impact support framework for **agrifood and digital SMEs**, accelerating their **green and digital transformation** through cross-sectoral and cross-border collaboration. The project aims to strengthen both existing and emerging agrifood industries, enhance SME competitiveness, and improve their integration into **European and global value chains**.

SMEs are the main beneficiaries of the ecosystem fostered by GATE5.0, while the participating clusters play a central role as ecosystem orchestrators, connecting stakeholders across regions, industries, research, policy and society, and guiding innovation towards the priority performance areas and market opportunities where SMEs can create the greatest impact.



THE OVERALL OBJECTIVES THAT GATE5.0 AIMS TO ADDRESS ARE:

- Accelerate the green and digital transformation of the European agrifood sector by supporting SMEs in the development and scaling of innovative AgriTech solutions based on advanced Agriculture 5.0 technologies.
- Strengthen cross-sectoral and cross-border agrifood value chains, enhancing the competitiveness, sustainability and resilience of the European agrifood ecosystem.
- Enable SMEs to bring innovation to market through structured acceleration, business support, capacity building and internationalisation actions.
- Reinforce the role of clusters as key innovation ecosystems, connecting stakeholders and driving high-impact innovation.

AMONG OTHERS, GATE5.0 WILL DELIVER MEASURABLE AND HIGH-IMPACT RESULTS, INCLUDING:

- Support to at least 80 SMEs through integrated acceleration, capacity-building and business support activities.
- Implementation and validation of 10 large-scale demonstrators, showcasing innovative AgriTech solutions in real operational environments.
- Minimum 25% reduction in carbon footprint among participating SMEs, contributing directly to EU climate and sustainability objectives.
- At least 20% reduction in input use (water, fertilizers and pesticides) in pilot SMEs, improving resource efficiency and environmental performance.



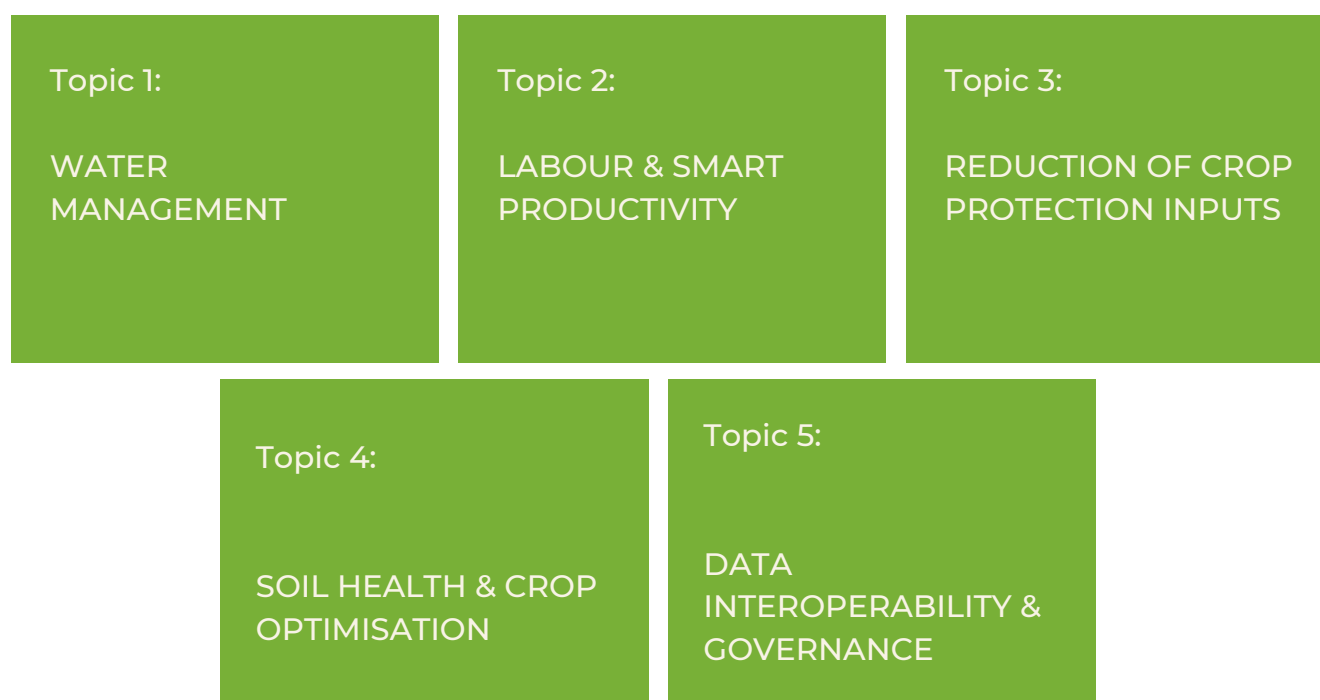
3. WHO ARE WE



4. INDICATIVE CHALLENGES AND TOPICS

The GATE5.0 process starts with the systematic identification of real challenges faced by the agri-food sector together with the potential technological solutions to address them, ensuring that the project's innovation strategy is grounded in concrete market needs directly expressed by stakeholders, as well as in feasible technological solutions proposed by the actors who develop them.

Based on the aggregation and transnational comparison of these challenges and solution potentials, five main thematic areas have been defined, each capturing the most pressing priorities and innovation opportunities for the sector.



Projects are not limited to these topics; proposals may also address additional relevant challenges, provided that their relevance to the agri-food sector and the need to address them are clearly demonstrated, along with the appropriateness of the proposed technological solutions.

Topic 1:

**WATER
MANAGEMENT**



- Smart irrigation and precision water use
- Real-time monitoring of soil and climate conditions
- Data-driven irrigation recommendations and decision support
- Integration of field data, satellite data and historical datasets
- Automation and optimisation of irrigation systems
- Traceability, accountability and governance of water use

The proposed projects may cover, among others, the following performance areas:

Indicative Key Performance Areas

Sustainability

- Water and energy efficiency
- Environmental impact reduction
- Resource optimisation and cost savings

New Digital Solutions

- IoT & sensor platforms
- Data analytics & AI-based decision support
- Digital twins & smart irrigation tools
- Digital transformation of farm water management

Security

- Secure data sharing & traceability
- Data protection & cybersecurity
- Trust frameworks and digital identity

Topic 2:

Labour & Smart
Productivity



- Digitalisation of farm operations and workflows
- Task planning, workforce optimisation and process automation
- Knowledge management and decision-support tools
- Robotics, drones and autonomous systems
- Computer vision and monitoring of crop activities
- Integration of digital platforms into daily farm operations

The proposed projects may cover, among others, the following performance areas:

Indicative Key Performance Areas

Sustainability

- Operational efficiency
- Cost reduction
- Resource optimisation

New Digital Solutions

- Smart task management & planning
- AI, robotics, drones & computer vision
- Farm management platforms & APIs
- Digital transformation of labour processes

Security

- Knowledge sharing & training tools
- Human-centric digital solutions

Topic 3:

Reduction of Crop Protection Inputs



- Precision crop protection and targeted treatments
- Monitoring and early detection of risks
- Digital field notebooks and traceability systems
- AI-based analysis of yield, quality and treatment data
- Regulatory compliance support and decision assistance
- Advanced detection technologies (e.g. hyperspectral analysis)

The proposed projects may cover, among others, the following performance areas:

Indicative Key Performance Areas

Sustainability

- Reduction of chemical inputs
- Environmental protection
- Safe and efficient production

New Digital Solutions

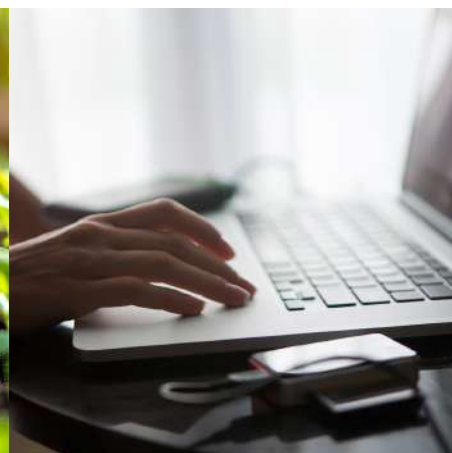
- AI & data-driven decision support
- Digital compliance tools
- Precision agriculture technologies

Security

- Traceability & identity preservation
- Data governance & regulatory compliance

Topic 4:

Soil Health & Crop
Optimisation



- Continuous soil monitoring and sensing
- Data-driven soil and crop management
- Regenerative and biodynamic farming technologies
- Conversion of complex soil data into actionable decisions
- Integration of soil data into existing irrigation and fertilisation practices

The proposed projects may cover, among others, the following performance areas:

Indicative Key Performance Areas

Sustainability

- Soil regeneration & conservation
- Climate resilience
- Resource efficiency
- Long-term productivity and ecosystem health

New Digital Solutions

- Soil sensing & monitoring systems
- Data platforms & AI analytics
- Decision-support tools for farmers
- Integration of soil data into farm management systems

Security

- Secure and reliable soil & field data management
- Data integrity, traceability and privacy
- Trust frameworks for data sharing

Topic 5:

Data Interoperability & Governance



- Interoperable data platforms and common data spaces
- Integration of operational, regulatory and field data
- Secure data sharing & governance frameworks
- Advanced analytics for value extraction from agricultural data
- Compliance with regulations and data governance models

The proposed projects may cover, among others, the following performance areas:

Indicative Key Performance Areas

Sustainability

- Data integration & standardisation
- Multi-user platforms & APIs

New Digital Solutions

- Data-driven business models
- Advanced analytics & decision support

Security

- Data protection & privacy
- Trust frameworks & traceability
- Legal & regulatory compliance

5.FINANCIAL SUPPORT

The total amount for funding support for SME's projects is EUR 1,970,000. being EUR 1.650.000 allocated for the GATE5.0 Acceleration Program and EUR 320.000 allocated for the GATE5.0 Capacity Building Activities. The call for proposals is designed as an **Open Innovation Challenge competition**. The maximum amount of financial support that a single SME can directly receive is EUR 59,250; therefore, the maximum funding per SME consortium project is EUR 118,500.

The funding support applying for each beneficiary project are the followings:

	No. SMEs	Acceleration Program	Capacity Building Activities	Total per phase
SEED PHASE	80	1.250€	1.000€	2.250€
SPROUT PHASE	40	29.000€	3.500€	32.500€
HARVEST PHASE	20	19.500€	5.000€	24.500€
Total Funding Support per SMEs		49.750€	9.500€	59.250€

Legal Framework – Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP)

This Call for Proposals is implemented as Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) under Grant Agreement No. 101236973 – GATE5.0, in accordance with the applicable provisions of the Grant Agreement.

The financial support awarded to selected SMEs is subject to the obligations related to eligibility, reporting, controls, audits, recoveries, communication and visibility, as established in the Grant Agreement and relevant EU financial regulations.

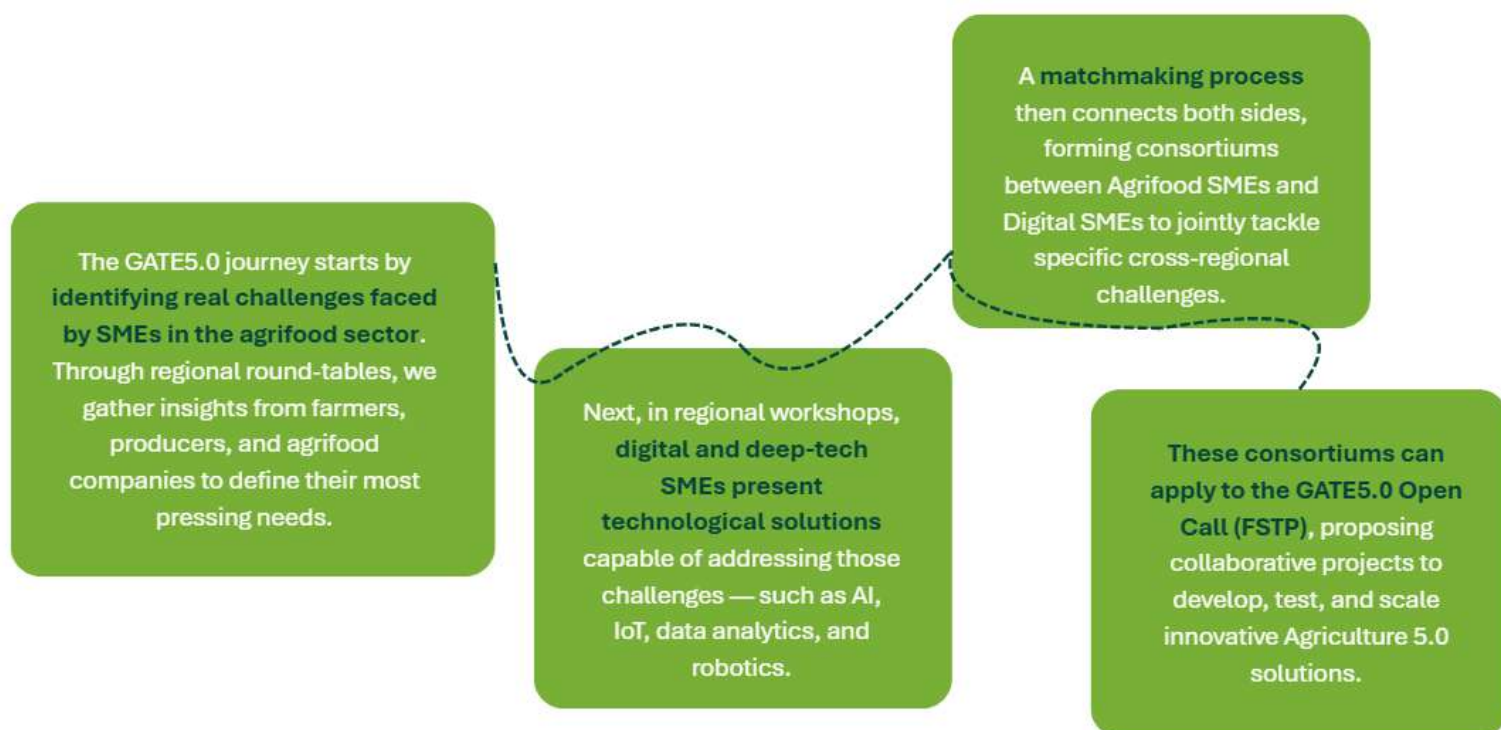
Beneficiary SMEs commit to comply with all applicable contractual, financial and regulatory obligations throughout the duration of the supported action.

6. HOW IT WORKS

6.1. THE GATE5.0 METHODOLOGY

GATE5.0 follows a market-driven, solution-oriented approach that transforms real sector challenges into scalable Agriculture 5.0 innovations.

1. Identify Challenges – Real needs collected from agri-food SMEs via Regional Round Tables.
2. Map Solutions – Digital and deep-tech SMEs present technologies to address those needs.
3. Match & Build Consortia – Agrifood and digital SMEs connect to develop joint solutions.
4. Apply & Accelerate – Consortia apply to the Open Call and scale solutions with GATE5.0 support, participating in the acceleration Program.



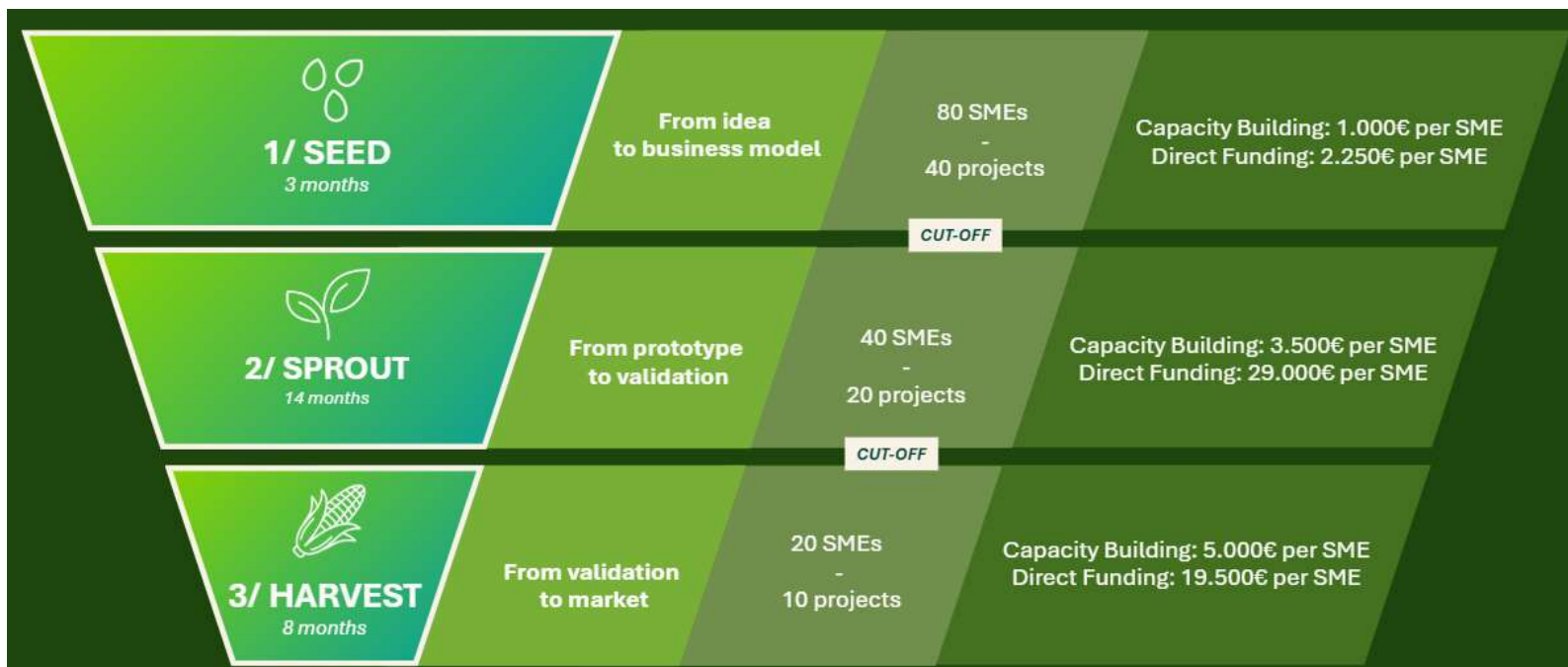
6. HOW IT WORKS

6.2. THE GATE5.0 ACCELERATION PROGRAM

The GATE5.0 Acceleration Programme is a structured three-phase innovation pathway — Seed, Sprout and Harvest — designed to guide selected SMEs from early-stage development to market-ready and pilot-tested solutions. All proposed solutions must demonstrate a minimum **Technology Readiness Level (TRL) of 6** at the time of application, ensuring that projects entering the programme are sufficiently mature for validation, demonstration and market-oriented scaling.

Each phase supports the progressive advancement of SME projects towards high technology readiness levels (up to TRL 8) by strengthening both their technical capabilities and business competences through an integrated innovation and entrepreneurship approach.

The GATE5.0 Open Call selects high-potential SMEs to enter the Acceleration Programme and benefit from the full GATE5.0 support framework.





One Open Call is launched within GATE5.0 to select high-potential SME projects to enter the GATE5.0 Acceleration Programme, following the three-phase structure Seed, Sprout and Harvest.

During the Seed phase, selected SMEs receive initial financial support and targeted business services to validate their innovation concept and define their development roadmap.

In the Sprout phase, top-performing projects advance to deeper technical development and market validation, benefiting from increased financial support and an extended package of business and capacity-building services.

In the final Harvest phase, the highest-potential projects progress towards large-scale demonstration and market deployment, receiving tailored financial support and specialised business services to accelerate commercialisation and cross-border expansion.

Each selected SME may receive up to EUR 59,250 in total support, combining direct financial contribution for project development and business support services (including training, mentoring, matchmaking and internationalisation).

Accordingly, the maximum budget per SME consortium project is EUR 118,500.

Throughout the programme, each project is assigned a dedicated Project Officer from one of the participating clusters, ensuring continuous technical, business and ecosystem support based on the project's technological focus and targeted market region.



6. 2. Services funded: the GATE5.0 ACCELERATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING ACTIVITIES



GATE5.0 provides a structured package of Acceleration and Capacity Building services to selected SME projects to strengthen innovation capabilities, accelerate the path to product-market fit, and support market uptake and access to financing.

Services are delivered progressively across the three programme phases (SEED, SPROUT and HARVEST) and adapted to the maturity and needs of each project.

The support framework includes:

- Bootcamps
- Focused training workshops
- Business coaching for business model discovery and optimisation
- Mentoring
- Product-market fit assessment
- Matchmaking with ecosystem stakeholders and market players
- Re-skilling and competence development
- Application of agile innovation methodologies

Funding and participation modalities

Participation in the programme is supported through the project's Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) mechanism, which provides direct financial support to selected SMEs for eligible project development activities linked to their milestones, including both Acceleration and Capacity Building activities.

The FSTP is directly granted to the selected SMEs, covering both the Acceleration and the Capacity Building components. SMEs shall use their allocated FSTP budget to cover the cost of eligible activities, including external mentoring and advisory services.

For the Capacity Building component, SMEs will contract and pay the selected mentoring or advisory expert directly, using the allocated FSTP budget. The GATE5.0 project will share a curated and recommended mentoring network to facilitate access to high-quality expertise and to support the development of the projects. SMEs remain free to select the mentor that best fits their project needs, also from outside of this proposed network.

Together, these components ensure both expert support and financial resources for successful market deployment.



Private Co-Financing Requirement

Additionally to the funding received by the GATE5.0 project, selected SMEs must contribute private financial resources to their project.

Each SME must include a minimum private contribution equivalent to 15% of the budget received under the GATE5.0 Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) scheme. This private contribution shall complement the FSTP support and result in a total project budget composed of the FSTP grant plus the required private contribution.

How this will be verified

- **At application stage:** SMEs must indicate, in the application form, the planned amount and source of their private contribution.
- **Before signature of the Sub-Grant Agreement:** Provisionally selected SMEs will undergo a financial capacity check and confirm the availability of the declared private resources.
- **At signature of the Sub-Grant Agreement:** Selected SMEs will formally commit, through a contractual clause, to provide the required minimum private contribution.
- **During project implementation:** Compliance will be assessed at project level through the successful achievement of milestones under the lump-sum scheme.

Failure to comply with this requirement may result in the non-signature or termination of the Sub-Grant Agreement.

Leveraging Private Investment during the Project:

Beyond the mandatory private contribution, GATE5.0 integrates an investment-readiness pathway aimed at leveraging public funding and crowding in additional private capital. The programme supports SMEs in strengthening their bankability and facilitates connections with corporates and investors — particularly during the HARVEST phase and the GATE5.0 Gala — to enable private co-investment and follow-up financing beyond the project period support.

6.3. The Program phases

The awarded projects will enter into the Acceleration program and GATE5.0 Capacity Building Program described in the previous sections. Both initiatives run simultaneously across the 3 defined phases: **SEED - SPROUT - HARVEST**



6.3.1. PHASE 1: SEED



Up to 40 selected proposals, involving 80 SMEs in total, will enter Phase 1: SEED of the GATE5.0.

This phase will run for **3 months after the selection of proposals (Aug-Oct 2026)**.

During this phase, the objective is to support SMEs in transforming their ideas into potential businesses. SMEs will work within their pre-defined agrifood-tech project teams, each composed of one agrifood SME and one digital/technology SME, to establish a solid foundation for collaboration, business development and demonstrator design.

Throughout the SEED phase, SMEs will be supported through a structured combination of **Acceleration and Capacity Building services**, enabling the **definition of their value proposition, innovation and business model**. These services will guide SMEs in the working methodology of the GATE5.0 Programme, the development and validation of their business model and value proposition, and the preparation of a **video pitch** clearly presenting their joint value proposition and intended demonstrator use case.

Each project will deliver the following **key milestones**:

- **Video Pitch (MS1)**

This milestone is designed to strengthen collaboration between **agrifood and technology SMEs** and to ensure that each project enters the next phase with a **coherent, market-oriented and scalable project concept**.

To benefit from the GATE5.0 Programme in Phase 1, each participating SME will receive a total financial support of **EUR 2,250**, consisting of:

- **EUR 1,250** of direct financial support for Acceleration activities, linked to the **approval of MS1**, and
- **EUR 1,000** allocated to cover participation in the GATE5.0 Capacity Building Programme.

At the end of the SEED phase, the **GATE5.0 Evaluation Board** will assess the progress and performance of the participating projects and select the **top 20 projects** to advance to **Phase 2: SPROUT**.

6.3.2. PHASE 2: SPROUT



Following the initial selection, the **top 40 SMEs** (corresponding to up to **20 agrifood-tech project consortia**) will progress to Phase 2: SPROUT of the GATE5.0 Programme. This phase will run for **14 months (Nov 2026 - Dic 2027)**

During this phase, the focus will shift to the **development and validation of prototypes**, building upon the value propositions established in Phase 1 and advancing the projects towards **Technology Readiness Level 7 (TRL 7)**.

SMEs will work within their established **agrifood-tech project teams** to strengthen both the technical solution and the **business model**, validate their demonstrators in real **operational environments**, and prepare for **market entry and scaling**.

Throughout the SPROUT phase, SMEs will be supported through a structured combination of **Acceleration and Capacity Building services**, including **coaching, targeted training, expert mentoring and continuous project follow-up**, ensuring steady progress and timely risk mitigation.

Each project will deliver the following **key milestones**:

- **Technical Feasibility Report (MS2)**
- **Business Plan (MS3)**

These milestones ensure both the **technical robustness** and the **commercial viability** of the supported innovations.

Each SME will receive a total of **EUR 32,500** under a lump sum scheme, consisting of:

- **EUR 29,000** of direct financial support for Acceleration activities linked to the approval of M2 and M3, and
- **EUR 3,500** to cover participation in the GATE5.0 Capacity Building Programme.

At the end of the SPROUT phase, the **GATE5.0 Evaluation Board** will assess the progress and maturity of the projects and select the **top 10 projects** to advance to **Phase 3: HARVEST**.

6.3.3. PHASE 3: HARVEST



Following the evaluation of the SPROUT phase, the top 20 SMEs (corresponding to up to 10 agrifood-tech project consortia) will advance to **Phase 3: HARVEST** of the GATE5.0 Programme.

This phase will run for **8 months (Jan 2028 - Aug 2028)**

During this phase, the focus will be on **large-scale demonstration, market uptake and scaling**, advancing projects to **TRL 8–9** through the deployment of **Large-Scale Demonstrators (LSDs)** in real operational environments.

SMEs will work within their established agrifood-tech project teams to finalise product development, implement their solutions in real farming environments, validate performance under operational conditions, and prepare for market entry and large-scale deployment.

Throughout the HARVEST phase, SMEs will receive advanced Acceleration and Capacity Building support, including technical mentoring, business coaching, matchmaking and internationalisation support.

In addition, during the HARVEST phase, all FSTP-SMEs will be invited to participate in the “GATE5.0 Gala”, an in-situ showcase, networking forum, where SMEs will present their demonstrators, business progress and market-ready solutions to key actors of the European agrifood ecosystem, including corporates, investors, public authorities and innovation stakeholders.

Each project will deliver the following key milestones:

- **Large-Scale Demonstrator Showcase (MS4)**
- **Product-Market Fit Report (MS5)**

These milestones ensure the **commercial maturity, scalability and long-term impact** of the supported innovations.

Each SME will receive a total of **EUR 24,500** under a lump sum scheme, consisting of:

- **EUR 19,500** of direct financial support for Acceleration activities linked to the approval of MS4 and MS5, and
- **EUR 5,000** allocated to cover participation in the advanced GATE5.0 Capacity Building Programme.

At the end of the HARVEST phase, SMEs will exit the programme with **market-ready solutions** and established paths for scaling.

ACCELERATION PROGRAM TIMELINE

The GATE5.0 Acceleration Programme will officially start in August 2026. This date will mark Month 1 (M1) of the supported projects.

All phases, milestones and payments described in this Call (M1–M25) are calculated from this starting point.

Accordingly:

- Phase 1 – SEED: M1–M3
- Phase 2 – SPROUT: M4–M17
- Phase 3 – HARVEST: M18–M25

The maximum duration of a supported project under the GATE5.0 Programme is 25 months.

Phase	Duration	Milestone (Delivery Month)	Payment Type	Payment Timing
Phase 1 – SEED	M1–M3 (3 months)		€1,000 Capacity Building	Paid at M1 (start of phase)
		MS1 – Video Pitch (M3)	€1,250 Acceleration	Paid upon MS1 validation (M4)
Phase 2 – SPROUT	M4–M17 (14 months)		€3,500 Capacity Building	Paid at M4 (start of phase)
		MS2 – Technical Feasibility Report (M6)	€14,500 Acceleration	Paid upon MS2 validation (M7)
		MS3 – Business Plan (M17)	€14,500 Acceleration	Paid upon MS3 validation (M18)
Phase 3 – HARVEST	M18–M25 (8 months)		€5,000 Capacity Building	Paid at M18 (start of phase)
		MS4 – Large-Scale Demonstrator Showcase (M21)	€9,750 Acceleration	Paid upon MS4 validation (M22)
		MS5 – Product–Market Fit Report (M25)	€9,750 Acceleration	Paid upon MS5 validation (M26)

The timeline, phase durations and milestone delivery months indicated above are indicative and may be subject to minor adjustments for operational or organisational reasons.

Any such adjustments will be communicated in advance to the selected beneficiaries and will not affect the overall duration of the programme (maximum 25 months) or the total financial support allocated per SME.

7. WHO CAN APPLY

To be eligible to apply for GATE5.0 Call for Proposals, your company must meet the following requirements:

- Be legally established in an EU Member States or in countries associated to the SMP (as of today: Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein), or in Ukraine, when established in territories that are under the effective control of the Ukrainian authorities at the submission deadline.
- Belong to the value chain of the Agri-food, Digital- ICT sectors.
- The proposed technological solution must demonstrate a minimum Technology Readiness Level (TRL) 6 at the time of application (system/subsystem model or prototype demonstrated in a relevant environment).
- Be a SME (including startup) according to the EU definition:

Enterprise category	Headcount: annual work unit (AWU)	Annual turnover	or	Annual balance sheet total
Medium-sized	< 250	≤ EUR 50 million	or	≤ EUR 43 million
Small	< 50	≤ EUR 10 million	or	≤ EUR 10 million
Micro	< 10	≤ EUR 2 million	or	≤ EUR 2 million

7. WHO CAN APPLY

All proposals must be submitted by consortia (“joint proposals”).

A joint proposal consists of two SMEs / Startups, including one **agri-food SME** and one **technology SME**.

One individual shall be designated as the **Project Lead** and will act as the main contact and responsible person towards the Consortium members.

However, both the agri-food SME and the technology SME must each appoint a project representative, and both representatives must remain actively involved and present throughout the project implementation.

Each SME / Startup will sign an **individual Sub-Grant Agreement** and will be fully responsible for the fulfilment of its respective contractual obligations.

By submitting a proposal, applicants formally declare their commitment to actively participate in all mandatory programme activities, including Acceleration and Capacity Building services, workshops, mentoring sessions, evaluation milestones, monitoring activities and final showcase events, as defined in this Call.

Active participation in these activities constitutes an eligibility condition and a contractual obligation under the Sub-Grant Agreement. Failure to comply with this obligation during the implementation of the project may result in suspension of payments, termination of the Sub-Grant Agreement and/or recovery of funds, in accordance with the contractual provisions.

Financial support and payments will be provided directly to each SME, and not at consortium level.



8. HOW TO SUBMIT A PROPOSAL

8.1. CALL FOR PROPOSAL TIMELINE

- 1** The GATE5.0 Call for Proposals will be published on 1 March 2026, with the submission deadline set for 30 April 2026, remaining accessible to applicants for a minimum period of two months.
- 2** Following the closure of the call, the evaluation process will take place during May and June 2026.
- 3** Selected projects will be officially notified in July 2026. The formalisation of participation will be carried out through the signing of the corresponding Sub-grant Agreement.

8.2. PROPOSAL SUBMISSION PROCEDURE AND REQUIREMENTS

- All proposals must be submitted via the [GATE5.0 Proposal Management Platform](#)
- All proposals must be submitted in English language.
- Proposals should be submitted jointly by 2 SMEs / Startups.
- Only one proposal per SME / Startup can be selected for funding.
- Applicants must complete the [online form](#).



[APPLY HERE](#)

Alignment Between Application Form and Evaluation Criteria:

The structure of the Application Form is fully aligned with the Evaluation Criteria and Scoring Mechanism described in this Call.

All information requested from applicants directly corresponds to specific evaluation criteria, ensuring full traceability, objectivity and transparency throughout the assessment and selection process.

9. ELIGIBLE COSTS

The financial support (lump-sum) provided to the Beneficiary SMEs-project will support their participation in the GATE5.0 Acceleration Program including the GATE5.0 capacity building activities, the delivery of the prototype, the implementation of the demonstrators and the preparation of the deliverables.

The lump-sum is aimed at covering the following costs incurred by the beneficiaries:

-  Personnel costs directly link to the SMEs-projects receiving financial support
-  Travel costs related to the SMEs-projects receiving financial support
-  Equipment or software bought or used for the SMEs-projects receiving financial support (depreciation, leasing, rental costs)
-  Direct cost for subcontracting products and/or services linked to the SMEs-project receiving financial support
-  Costs related to intellectual property rights (IPR)
-  Capacity Building Activities: bootcamps; training (business, digital and market skills); mentoring and coaching; prototype validation; networking and showcases; testbeds access; commercialization and investment support.

The eligible costs covered by the lump-sum financial support, including the corresponding Capacity Building activities, will be further specified in each respective Phase Guide (SEED, SPROUT and HARVEST) shared when the project enters the program. This will ensure full clarity, transparency and consistency in the implementation of the programme.

10. EVALUATION PROCESS

10.1. EVALUATION COMITEE

The Evaluation Committee is composed of 1 evaluator from each of the following countries: Portugal, Netherlands, Spain and Lithuania. Therefore, the committee will be formed by 4 evaluators, coordinated by Cluster Digital de Catalunya.

Principles Governing the Evaluation Process

The evaluation and selection process will be conducted in full compliance with the following principles: Equal treatment and non-discrimination, transparency, confidentiality and absence of conflict of interest.

All applications will be assessed solely on the basis of the evaluation criteria defined in this Call. The same conditions and scoring rules will apply to all applicants.

Members of the Evaluation Committee will act independently and impartially. They will not evaluate applications where a conflict of interest exists or may reasonably be perceived to exist.

In particular:

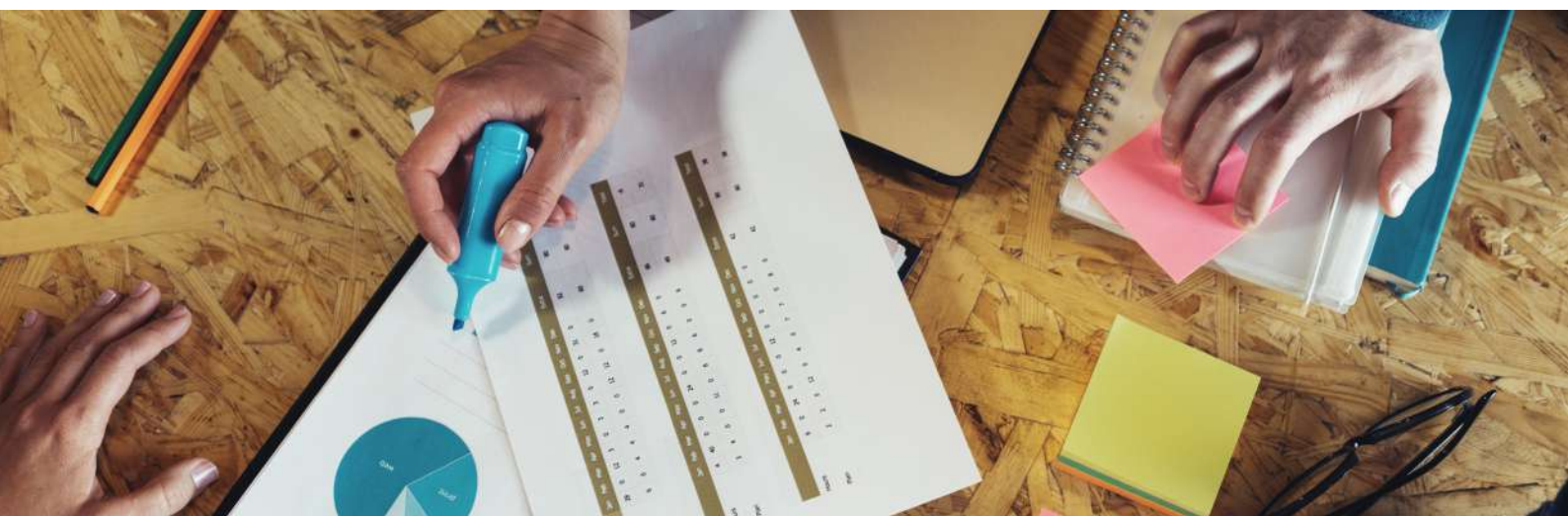
- Evaluators will not assess applications submitted by entities established in their own country.
- Evaluators will not assess applications from organisations with which they have any direct or indirect professional, financial or personal relationship.

All information contained in the applications will be treated as confidential and shall not be disclosed to third parties outside the evaluation process.

10.2. EVALUATION PROCESS

The evaluation process of applications, which will take approximately 6 weeks after the call deadline is closed, is summarized in the following steps:

- 1** Administrative revision of applications and request of documentation, if needed.
- 2** Evaluation Committee's coordinator distributes applications proportionally among all the evaluators. SME / Startup general information (i.e., company name, country, etc.) will be hidden from evaluators to ensure a fair, independent process.
- 3** Each of the evaluators will assess the applications assigned to him or her and will fill an evaluation form prepared for the purpose.
- 4** Evaluation Committee's Coordinator will collect all evaluation forms and generate a ranked list from the highest scored application to the lowest.
- 5** The Evaluation Committee meets to validate the results and agree on the final list of selected SMEs and Startups and a reserve list.



10.3. EVALUATION CRITERIA AND SCORING MECHANISM

To enter into the GATE5.0 Acceleration Program, the eligible projects will be evaluated and ranked according to the following evaluation criteria and scores, applying the ex-aequo rule, considering the same conditions to all participants.

Each application must be submitted by a joint consortium composed of one agri-food SME providing a real operational need and one technology SME providing the corresponding solution. Both SMEs shall jointly design, develop and implement the proposed project throughout the programme.

Main criteria	Sub-criteria	Scoring
1. Innovation Potential	Alignment with the call challenges	[0 – 5]
	Relevance of the agri-food need	[0 – 5]
	Innovativeness of the proposed solution	[0 – 5]
2. Project implementation	Technology readiness levels and time to market: Viability to move from TRL 6 to TRL 8	[0 – 5]
	Quality and coherence of the joint technical description (need + solution)	[0 – 5]
	Clarity and credibility of the joint workplan and cost structure	[0– 5]
3. Business Potential of the applicant	Strength and complementarity of the two companies involved	[0 – 5]
	Quality and balance of the project teams (agri + tech)	[0– 5]
	Experience in previous innovation projects	[0 – 5]
4. Expected Impacts	Expected impact on the competitiveness of the participating SMEs	[0 – 5]
	Expected impact in the target agrifood sector(s)	[0 – 5]
	Maximum score	55

Additional scores will be given to:

Main criteria	Sub-criteria	Scoring
1.A Joint cross-border applications	Applications submitted by SMEs established in two different countries	5
1.B Joint cross-regional applications	Applications submitted by SMEs established in two different regions	3
2. Quadruple Helix approach	Proposals involving additional stakeholders beyond the two mandatory SMEs (e.g., universities, research centres, public authorities, higher education institutions, corporations or other relevant ecosystem actors) contributing to the project implementation	2
	Maximum score	62

Scoring Methodology

Each sub-criterion will be scored from 0 (minimum) to 5 (maximum).

All main criteria carry equal weight in the evaluation.

The additional criterion provides extra points without affecting the weighting of the main criteria.

The maximum achievable score is 62 points.

Tie-breaking Rule

In case of proposals receiving the same total score, the tie shall be resolved through the appointment of an additional independent external evaluator, who will carry out a further assessment of the tied proposals based on the existing evaluation criteria.

The results of this additional evaluation shall be final and shall determine the ranking of the tied proposals.

Ranking and Reserve List

Following the evaluation process, proposals will be ranked in descending order according to their final score.

A reserve list will be established. Proposals on the reserve list may be invited to receive funding in case selected applicants withdraw, a project does not complete the Sub-Grant Agreement process, or other duly justified circumstances arise.

Inclusion in the reserve list does not constitute an entitlement to receive funding.

Geographical Balance Requirement

The selection process shall ensure that at least 10% of the selected SMEs are established in regions outside the core consortium regions.

In case of proposals receiving the same final score (ex-aequo), priority may be given to proposals contributing to geographical balance.

The Consortium will monitor the geographical distribution of selected SMEs throughout the selection process and may apply corrective measures at the selection stages, where necessary and without compromising the principles of transparency, equal treatment and merit-based evaluation.

Redress Procedure

Applicants may request clarification on the evaluation outcome within 5 calendar days from the notification of results.

The review will be limited to procedural aspects and will not involve a re-evaluation of the proposal.

Progression to Next Phases

The selection of the SME-projects that will advance to the next programme phases (SPROUT and HARVEST) will be based on their performance in the previous phase, according to the evaluation criteria defined for each phase of the programme.

The evaluation criteria will be the following:

Main criteria	Sub-criteria	Scoring	Weight
1. Attendance to the GATE 5.0 Capacity Building Activities	• 100% attendance	3	33,3%
	• 80% attendance	2	
	• 60% attendance	1	
2. Quality of the deliverables	• High quality	3	33,3%
	• Medium quality	2	
	• Poor quality	1	
3. Implementation according to project plan	• No deviation	3	33,3%
	• Minor deviation	2	
	• Major deviation	1	
	Maximum score	9	100%

11. FORMALIZATION OF THE PARTICIPATION

11.1. VALIDATION OF THE SME STATUS AND ITS FINANCIAL CAPACITY

The selected project proposals will be notified within 2 months after the closure of the call for proposal. Those participants whose proposal is selected will be asked to provide a copy of the following documents related to the last two years of closed accounts:

- Balance sheet
- Profit and loss account
- Staff head count (in annual working units)

This financial capacity check will evaluate the recipient's financial health and stability through the documents listed above.

If a provisionally selected applicant does not demonstrate sufficient financial capacity to implement the proposed actions, the Consortium will not proceed with the signature of the Sub-Grant Agreement and reserves the right to invite the next highest-ranked proposal from the reserve list.

Specific cases:

For newly established enterprises (start-up enterprises) that have not yet closed accounts: a self-declaration, including a bona fide estimate (in the form of a business plan) for the on-going financial year[1].

For enterprises without turnover whose activity implies a long time-to market: a declaration of the investment made and the likely expected return (to demonstrate that it is engaged in an economic activity).

Payment Conditions, Suspension and Recovery of Funds

Payments to Beneficiary SMEs are strictly linked to the successful achievement and validation of the contractual milestones defined in the Sub-Grant Agreement.

In case of partial or total non-compliance with contractual obligations, false declarations, misrepresentation, or failure to deliver the agreed milestones, the GATE5.0 Consortium reserves the right to suspend payments and/or recover unduly paid amounts, in accordance with the provisions of the Sub-Grant Agreement and the applicable EU financial rules.

Recovery procedures may include total or partial reimbursement of the granted financial support.



11.2. CONTRACTUAL CONDITIONS

The projects selected under this Call for Proposals to receive financial support (“Beneficiary SMEs-project”) will sign a Sub-Grant Agreement with the GATE5.0 Project Lead Cluster – Associació Clúster Digital de Catalunya (CLDI).

The Sub-Grant Agreement will define in detail the rights and obligations of the parties, including payment conditions, milestone validation, reporting duties, monitoring requirements, communication and visibility obligations, as well as conditions for suspension, recovery or termination of support where applicable.

The sub-grant negotiation and signature process is expected to take place by July 2026.

[The sub-grant document template is available here for consultation.](#)

Financial support is disbursed progressively and is linked to the achievement and validation of programme milestones.

The following table provides an overview of the contractual milestones applicable to each programme phase:

PROGRAM PHASE	MILESTONES
AWARDING phase	Agreement negotiation
SEED phase	Payment for the GATE5.0 Capacity Building Activities
	Attendance in Capacity Building Activities of at least 60%
	Submission of Milestone 1 – Video Pitch
SPROUT phase	Payment for the GATE5.0 Capacity Building Activities
	Attendance in Capacity Building Activities of at least 60%
	Submission of Milestone 2 – Technical and Feasibility Report
	Submission of Milestone 3 – Business Plan
	Attend the GATE5.0 Gala onsite
HARVEST phase	Payment for the GATE5.0 Capacity Building Activities
	Attendance in Capacity Building Activities of at least 60%
	Participation in the Final GALA event
	Submission of Milestone 4 – Large Scale- Demonstrator Showcase
	Submission of Milestone 5 - Product Market Fit Assessment

A detailed overview of the phase durations, deliverables, payment amounts and timing is provided in the Acceleration Programme Timeline (see page 23). The Sub-Grant Agreement and corresponding Phase Guides will further specify the validation criteria and implementation conditions for each milestone.

The submission of an application does not constitute an entitlement to receive financial support. The final award of funding and the number of supported projects remain subject to the availability of the allocated budget and the successful completion of the evaluation and validation procedures described in this Call.

Compliance, Confidentiality and Applicable Law

Beneficiary SMEs shall comply with all applicable contractual, legal and ethical obligations necessary for the proper implementation, monitoring and visibility of the supported action.

In particular, beneficiaries shall:

- Avoid and declare any conflict of interest that may affect the impartial implementation of the project.
- Ensure confidentiality and security of sensitive information exchanged within the framework of the programme.
- Respect applicable ethical principles and sector regulations.
- Comply with communication and visibility requirements related to EU co-funding, including the mandatory use of the EU emblem and funding acknowledgement in dissemination materials.
- Provide accurate, complete and timely information for monitoring and reporting purposes.
- Maintain adequate records and supporting documentation related to the supported activities for verification, control or audit purposes.

As part of the programme monitoring framework, supported SMEs shall complete **Satisfaction and Impact Questionnaires** across all programme phases. These questionnaires will include reporting on relevant output and impact indicators linked to the objectives of GATE5.0, including environmental performance, economic impact, innovation progress and employment effects, among others. The provision of such information constitutes a contractual obligation under the Sub-Grant Agreement.

All personal data collected under this Call will be processed in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR) and applicable national data protection legislation. Data will be used solely for the purposes of evaluating applications, implementing the programme and fulfilling monitoring and reporting obligations.

The Sub-Grant Agreement shall determine the applicable law and jurisdiction. Any dispute arising from its interpretation or implementation shall first be addressed amicably between the parties and, if unresolved, submitted to the specific competent courts.

Call for proposals for SMEs and Startups



[APPLY HERE](#)

CONTACT:
gate@clusterdigital.cat

[WEBSITE LINK](#)