

## **STEP Programme – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)**

**Please note that this document is updated regularly; we recommend checking back periodically to ensure you have the latest information.**

### **1. How do I prepare the budget for the proposed project?**

You should use the official Excel budget template, which can be found under the Call Documents on IRIS to prepare your budget. Once completed, convert the Excel file to PDF and merge it with the Part B (Technical Annex). The final combined document must be submitted through the IRIS portal.

### **2. There is a need to build new offices to create the required workspace and facilities for new software products. Does STEP support these activities?**

No. STEP only supports production-related infrastructure directly linked to the development and manufacturing of the product. Costs related to office space, land acquisition or general-purpose workspaces are not eligible under the programme.

### **3. I have a 10-year-old company. Can we benefit from the STEP programme?**

Yes. The programme is open to companies of all ages, provided that they meet the eligibility criteria and the proposed project aligns with the programme's scope.

### **4. We want to understand in-kind contribution. What counts as an in-kind contribution?**

The STEP programme does not require in-kind contributions. However, beneficiaries must contribute to the total project cost using their own financial resources, since RIF funding only covers a percentage of the eligible costs, in accordance with applicable State Aid rules. This contribution must be made in actual monetary terms and cannot be provided in-kind.

### **5. Given that STEP is a leverage product development programme, does it also offer opportunities for expansion or collaboration with other European companies for an already existing programme?**

No. STEP is specifically designed to support the establishment of production lines and product development for critical technologies. Activities focused on general business expansion or EU-level collaboration, without a production or development component, are outside the scope of the programme.

### **6. Is assembling acceptable under STEP, or is full manufacturing from scratch required?**

Purely logistical or general assembly activities without technological complexity or innovation are not supported. However, if assembly forms an integral part of a high-value production process that includes critical technological elements, it may be considered eligible. In any case, the nature and significance of the assembly process must be extensively described in the proposal and will be subject to evaluation by the experts.

**7. Can I submit multiple applications as the same organization?**

Each enterprise can only submit one proposal as Host Organisation.

**8. Are there any limitations on the size of the production line to be built? Are there specific guidelines?**

There are no strict limitations on the physical size of the production line; however, it must be proportionate to the scope of the project, the expected market demand, and the budget requested. The proposed production line should reflect a realistic scale-up plan aligned with the product's readiness and commercialisation strategy.

The STEP Programme supports "first-of-a-kind" or advanced manufacturing facilities, including expansion or repurposing of existing infrastructure. The justification must clearly explain the need, efficiency, and impact of the production setup in relation to the STEP objectives.

**9. Can I combine De Minimis aid with another State Aid Article for the same manufacturing activities?**

No, DE MINIMIS aid cannot be combined with other State Aid for the same eligible costs in a single project. However, it is possible to combine De Minimis aid with other articles for different activities, subject to compliance with EU rules on cumulation.

**10. In which cases can Partner Organisations participate?**

Partner Organisations may support the Host Organisation in achieving the technological objectives of the project (Development Activities). In case the Host Organisation is a Large Enterprise and Article 29 applies for the Manufacturing Activities, then the project must involve small and medium-sized enterprise(s) (SMEs) with at least 30% of the total eligible costs. Partners cannot participate in Manufacturing Activities under any other circumstances.

**11. Can the requested funding for development costs be €250,000 if this does not exceed 10% of the total requested funding?**

No. The requested funding for Development Activities must not exceed 10% of the total budget of the proposed project or €200,000, whichever is lower.

**12. How do I submit the budget Excel file? Do I also need to enter this information in Part A of the online application?**

The budget must be prepared using the official Excel template and submitted as a PDF attachment, merged with Part B (Technical Annex). There is no option to describe the budget breakdown in Part A of the proposal.

**13. What happens if I cannot get 3 offers for a specific item of equipment?**

Any deviation from the prescribed procedure of obtaining three offers must be adequately documented and justified, with reference to the relevant reasons that make it impossible to collect three offers. The relevant documentation should be submitted with the Proposal.

**14. Can you provide clarifications as to what should be included in the requested “An expert opinion on the eligibility of the selected State Aid article for activities related to the creation of facilities and production lines.”?**

The “expert opinion” should include a documented assessment of whether the proposed activities can be included in the selected state aid article, in accordance with the General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER).

**15. For the required document under Annex III (e) – “Sufficient documentation demonstrating the ability to access materials and/or components, etc., that meet the required quality and specifications for the proposed product/service, where applicable” – would it be acceptable to proceed with a self-declaration confirming the Company’s ability to access the necessary materials, or is it required to include a statement from the manufacturer/provider?**

The submission of a simple self-declaration is not sufficient. Appropriate supporting documents must be provided, such as certificates or statements from the manufacturer/supplier, supply contracts, offers, or other official documents proving access to materials/components that meet the required specifications.

**Revised Check List**

<b>STEP Check List</b>	
Applicants have <b>read thoroughly the Call for Proposals Document</b> which is available on the IRIS Portal.	<input type="checkbox"/>
All participating organisations already <b>registered and submitted their “Legal Info”</b> on the IRIS Portal	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Coordinator has submitted <b>“My profile”</b> and <b>“My researcher Info”</b> on the IRIS Portal	<input type="checkbox"/>
Applicants have used the <b>relevant Part B</b> for the Call provided under the call documents on IRIS – Technical Annex <b><u>without any differentiation</u></b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Applicants have used the <b>relevant Excel Template to prepare the Budget Proposal</b> for the Call provided under the call documents on IRIS – Technical Annex <b><u>without any differentiation, which has been merged with Part-B technical Annex?</u></b>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Applicants have <b>read thoroughly the Call for Proposals Document</b> which is available in the IRIS Portal.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Applicants have <b>duly completed all relevant sections of Part B</b> , according to the guidelines provided.	<input type="checkbox"/>
There are <b>no discrepancies</b> between Part A and Part B in terms of information provided.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Applicants have selected one STEP Sector in the relevant section below.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Applicants have stated the State Aid Article they will be using in the relevant section below.	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Host Organisation will only submit one proposal.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have the documents mandatory in Annex II been included? (a) Technoeconomic analysis and Business Plan.	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Project Coordinator must be employed by the Host Organisation at the time of proposal submission. Have the mandatory documents been included in Annex II? (b) Contract of employment of the Project Coordinator with the Host Organisation.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have the mandatory documents been included in Annex II? (c) Cost estimation for machinery and equipment necessary for the set-up of the facility / production line (which are included in the proposed project's budget) based on a minimum of 3 offers from 3 different suppliers who can meet the Host Organisation's requirements.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have the mandatory documents been included in Annex III? (a) An expert opinion on the eligibility of the selected State Aid article for activities related to the creation of facilities and production lines. This opinion will be evaluated by the RIF with the assistance of experts in State Aid matters.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have the mandatory documents been included in Annex III? (b) Documentation of own funding, through a declaration of funding sources (e.g., secured loan, own capital, investments, etc.), which will be verified during the contract preparation stage through the submission of relevant agreements and/or financial statements.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have the mandatory documents been included in Annex III? (c) Results of the analysis for the unrestricted ability to commercially exploit the project results ('freedom to operate'), including existing intellectual property rights held by the Host Organisation that are relevant to the project, as well as commercial exploitation licenses (if applicable).	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have the mandatory documents been included in Annex III? (d) Documentation proving the initiation of necessary contacts with the relevant authorities regarding the acquisition of licenses, certifications, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have the mandatory documents been included in Annex III? (e) Sufficient documentation demonstrating the ability to access materials and/or components, etc., that meet the required quality and specifications for the proposed product/service, where applicable.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have the mandatory documents been included in Annex III? (f) Any other supporting documentation deemed necessary to substantiate the claims made in the proposal.	<input type="checkbox"/>
The proposal is submitted in English.	<input type="checkbox"/>
The duration of project implementation is 36 months.	<input type="checkbox"/>
You have completed the "Requested Funding" field in Part A for each participating organisation (≤ Maximum Funding)?	<input type="checkbox"/>
The «Requested Funding» is in line with the maximum funding amount per Project defined in the Call for Proposals (≤ 2.000.000 Euro).	<input type="checkbox"/>
Applicants have performed a validation check in good time to ensure they are able to submit before the deadline.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Applicants have ensured that all requested information and documents have been submitted as part of their submission.	<input type="checkbox"/>