

Guide for Applicants

ET2SMEs Voucher Scheme | V7

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1 Introduction

The **Einstein Telescope** (ET) is a unique research project with global impact that will put Europe at the forefront of a new research discipline worldwide: The gravitational wave observatory of the latest, third generation will produce fundamentally new insights into the origin of the universe and the evolution of galaxies, stars and black holes. This “cutting edge” technology is not only associated with a qualitative leap in European research infrastructure. The investment for this large-scale research facility alone will amount to around 1,9 billion euros, 500 direct and 1,150 indirect jobs will be created and a further 2 billion euros are estimated for its operation until 2080.

The **Euregio Meuse-Rhine** (BE-NL-DE), along with Sardinia (IT), is the last suitable region in Europe to apply for the location of this facility. The telescope is to be built as geologically undisturbed as possible at a depth of about 300 m below the earth’s surface and will consist of a triangle of 10 km long sides. A final decision on the location at the European level is expected in 2024, and the facility is scheduled to go into operation in 2032. In order to bring the facility to our border region, substantial investments are already being made today: A total of 45 million euros is available for preparatory initiatives and projects, including on one hand the construction and operation of an ET pilot facility in Maastricht (ETpathfinder – 14.5 million euros), and on the other hand, underground design and location studies (geology part) and building of a prototype – a large suspended mirror at cryogenic temperature (10 Kelvin) – to validate the Einstein Telescope’s technology. (E-TEST – 15 million euros).

With the planning, construction and operation of the Einstein Telescope, there is the prospect of a large number of demanding and lucrative tasks for numerous enterprises, especially in the high-tech sector of the extended Euregio Meuse-Rhine. In all phases up to the permanent operation of the facility, enterprises from the border region will be able to apply directly for tenders and thus for numerous contracts involving the Einstein telescope. The regions of Flanders, Wallonia, Southern Netherlands and North Rhine-Westphalia are committed to ensuring that local businesses in particular benefit here.

Even if the Einstein Telescope still seems a long way off, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and large enterprises can already benefit from the facility today and, conversely, also contribute to prepare a “soft landing” for this high-tech facility in the extended Euregio Meuse-Rhine. The **ET2SMEs** initiative focuses precisely on SMEs from the extended EMR and supports them in developing new products, processes and procedures that are relevant to the Einstein Telescope, but also to other challenging European and global markets in the future.



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2 Voucher Scheme

2.1 Goal

The project **ET2SMEs**, including the other ET-related projects E-TEST and ETpathfinder, involves the development of new products in specific technology domains, in which cooperation between Science and Industry is an essential prerequisite.

The possibility, success and character of this cooperation is, amongst other factors, determined by the economic potential of this development for the industry. The economic potential is higher, in case the developed products and technologies can be used not only for the ET, but also for other applications commercialized by industry.

The process of establishing and implementation of SME-driven R&D is a challenge because of the required upfront investments in combination with the uncertain technological, commercial and economic feasibility. The goal of the voucher scheme is to stimulate SME's to innovate via business and project development support and lowering the financial risks via financial support, as well as the possibility of co-creation, thus shared effort and shared risk, with public and private organizations in the extended Euregio Meuse-Rhine. Furthermore, the project aims at fostering the cross-border cooperation to benefit the best from the technological potential existing in the EMR.

2.2 Budget

The budget for financial support in the voucher scheme is € 450.000 and is funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). This budget is available for vouchers up to € 50.000, is provided as a lump sum and is co-financed by own contribution, of (at least) the same amount, from the eligible SME's in their innovation project.

2.3 Duration

The voucher scheme runs until 31.05.2023. Applications can be submitted in the period between 01.11.2021 and 30.11.2022, as long as regional budget is available. During this period, there will be multiple calls where applications can be submitted. These calls will be published on the ET2SMEs website.



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3 Eligibility

3.1 Applicants

The ET2SMEs voucher can be applied for by an innovation-oriented **cross-border cooperation consortium** (hereafter: consortium). This consortium is formed by (at least) two technology-oriented enterprises that are independent from each other and are located on different sides of the national borders within the extended EMR-region.

The extended EMR-region is defined as follows¹:

- **Germany** regions Aachen (AAC), Bitburg-Prüm (BIP) and Vulkaneifel (VUL)
- **Belgium** regions Liège (LIE), Limburg (BLI) and Leuven (LEU)
- **Netherlands** regions Zuid- & Midden-Limburg (NLI) and Eindhoven (EIN)

One of these enterprises is an SME² that acts as lead partner on behalf of the consortium (hereafter: **Lead SME**). The other enterprise(s) can be SME as well or large enterprise.

Only SME's that are located inside the extended EMR-region are eligible for a voucher (hereafter: **eligible SME**). SME's located outside the extended EMR-region and all large enterprises and/or (research) institutions are not eligible for a voucher but can join the consortium as knowledge provider, supplier or partner (see table below).

An eligible SME can receive only be granted one voucher during the duration of the voucher scheme. Furthermore, a consortium that already existed before ET2SMEs can only apply for a voucher for a fully new project.

Consortium options ET2SMEs

Enterprise 1	Enterprise 2		Maximum voucher value	Additional partners		
	SME	Large enterprise		SME	Large enterprise	University / research institution
Lead SME						
Country 1 inside EMR+	Country 2 inside EMR+			inside or outside EMR+		
V	V		€ 50.000	V	V	V
V		V	€ 25.000	V	V	V

NOTES EMR+ = extended EMR region

¹ For the extended Euregio Meuse-Rhine, see [area map](#)

² Small and Medium-sized Enterprise, according to the [EU SME definition](#)

3.2 State-aid

The value of the voucher provided to the SME's complies with the State Aid rules under the **De Minimis exemption** detailed in EC Regulation 1407/2013. Under the De Minimis exemption scheme, an SME can receive up to €200,000 of state aid in a period of 3 consecutive years (the current financial year and the two previous financial years). Every kind of state aid received in this period must be included in the calculation.

A De Minimis Self-Declaration is part of the application and must be filled in and manually signed by a duly authorized person for each of the eligible SME's.

Compliance with the State Aid rules under the De Minimis exemption is the sole responsibility of the eligible SME's. Non-compliance will invalidate the right to a voucher and any payments already made will be recovered.

3.3 Project

The consortium is founded to carry out a new **cross-border innovation-oriented cooperation project** (hereafter: project). The objective of the project is to develop one or more innovative (new to the market or new to the firm) products, processes or procedures (hereafter: product) that are relevant to the Einstein Telescope, but also to other challenging European and global markets in the future.

Technologies that are relevant to the Einstein Telescope³ are, but are though not limited to:

Instruments

- Cryogenics
- Vacuum
- Precision Mechanics / Mechatronics
- Sensors
- Optics and Optical Metrology
- Mirrors Coating
- Lasers
- Advanced Control Algorithms

³ For a list of relevant Einstein Telescope technologies, see [ET Technology Catalogue](#)

Geology

- Tunnel Technology
- Geophysical Imaging and Remote Sensing
- Simulation and Modelling
- Water Technology

Eligible project activities are those activities that are demonstrably related to the project and are part of Industrial Research and/or Experimental Development⁴. The activities are necessary to achieve the objective of the project.

The project has a minimum of TRL 4 (Technology Readiness Level)⁵.

The end result(s) of the eligible project activities is (are) expressed in tangible and provable **deliverables**, that are agreed by the consortium partners and the regional ET2SMEs partner and will be included in the **Application Form** (see 5.1). The realization and provision of the proof of these deliverables are mandatory conditions for payment of the voucher (see 5.4). Some examples of tangible deliverables are: a feasibility or test report, a proof of principle-setup, prototype, etc. The regional ET2SMEs partners can support with defining the appropriate deliverables.

3.4 Lead Time

The maximum allowed lead time for the eligible project activities and realization of the deliverables is **9 months**, starting on the date of the signing of the Application Form by the regional ET2SMEs partner. The lead time includes the submission of the Final Evaluation Report to request payment of the voucher. For projects starting after 31.06.2022, the available lead time is shorter than 9 months and the last date for submission of the Final Evaluation Report is 31.03.23.

3.5 Eligible Costs

Eligible costs are costs incurred by an eligible SME in the consortium, for the implementation of project activities necessary for realization of the deliverables during the lead time.

⁴ For EU definitions, see [Industrial Research and Experimental Development](#)

⁵ For TRL definitions, see [Technology Readiness Levels \(TRL\)](#)

Examples of eligible costs are staff costs, external costs, material costs, equipment costs. Examples of non-eligible costs are VAT, marketing costs, costs outside the lead time or outside the scope of the project or costs for basic research (TRL 1 - TRL 3).

4 Voucher

4.1 Contribution

The voucher offers a contribution of up to 50% of the eligible costs within a project.

Consortia with one eligible SME can apply for a voucher of maximum € 25.000,-

Consortia with two or more eligible SME's can apply for a voucher of maximum € 50.000,-

4.2 Payment

The voucher is paid to the Lead SME after approval of the Final Evaluation Report. Realization and provision of proof of the predefined deliverables are mandatory conditions for payment of the voucher. Advance payments nor instalments are allowed. Further agreements on the share of the voucher amount among the eligible SMEs of the consortium has to be defined within the Application Form.

5 Process

5.1 Application

Voucher applications can be submitted during multiple **calls**, latest on the deadline of a specific call. The calls and corresponding deadlines are published on the ET2SMEs website.

The voucher application is done by the Lead SME on behalf of the consortium (see 3.1). The application consists of two completely filled in documents, according to the formats valid for that call (available on the ET2SMEs website):

- Application Form;
- Self-Declaration Form eligible SME's: SME status, De Minimis and SME Not In Difficulty.

The Application Form defines the consortium partners as well as the project, including the deliverables that are decisive for payment of the voucher after completion of the project. The Application Form must be signed by all involved partners in the consortium.

The signed documents are submitted to the regional ET2SMEs partner by email by the Lead SME. Upon receipt, the Lead SME will receive a confirmation by email.

Within 5 working days after receipt, the application is checked for completeness and conformity with the criteria specified in this Guide for Applicants. With a positive result, the Lead SME will receive the eligibility confirmation by email. In case of any irregularities, the Lead SME will be informed and be given the opportunity to correct and resubmit the application within the requested term. In case the eligibility criteria are not met, the Lead SME will receive a negative notice. Only complete and eligible applications, received latest on the deadline, will be taken into consideration.

5.2 Assessment

The assessment of an application is done by the **assessment committee**, consisting of the ET2SMEs project partners, with the exception of those in whose regions the (lead) sme's in an application are located. The consultation of independent, external business and/or technology experts from the involved regions is part of the assessment procedure. These experts will be consulted for their expertise about the business or technology aspect of the innovation project.

Each application is assessed on the following **assessment criteria**:

- **Innovativeness**: the level of innovation and/or innovative results expected out of the proposed activities;
- **Market**: the level of a market-oriented cooperation and market potential;
- **High-tech character**: the level of technology and connection with the Einstein Telescope technologies;
- **Regional economic impact**: the level of regional economic impact within the extended EMR-region.

For each of the criteria above, the application will be awarded a score, wherein each of the criteria will have an equal weight on the total evaluation score, which is a factor for selection.

The selection and allocation (tendering) will be based on the following aspects:

1. Score on assessment criteria (result is positive or negative);
2. In case of shortage of voucher scheme budget: tendering.

In case of tendering, ranking will be based on two consecutive criteria:

- Ranking based on score on assessment criteria;
- Ranking on balance on ET technologies.

The assessment of each application can lead to two results: **approved** or **declined**. The Lead SME will be informed about the result within one week after the assessment and will receive a decision letter per email.

A declined application can be re-applied one time in a next call, with an improved Application Form, that will be considered as a new application.

Detailed information on the assessment procedure is available upon request.

5.3 Project Realization

After approval of the application, the Application Form is signed by the regional ET2SMEs partner and (a copy) is sent to the Lead SME.

The consortium is responsible for realizing the project activities within the project, according to the approved application, and within the specified lead time of the project. In particular, the commitment of the consortium is aimed at achieving the predefined deliverables, which is a mandatory condition for approval of the Final Evaluation Report and payment of the voucher.

The regional ET2SMEs partner is available for support and will monitor the progress of the project. Upon request, the Lead SME provides insight in the project status.

In case of an arisen situation that affects (the feasibility of) the project objective, consortium, deliverables or whatsoever that has an impact on the project, the Lead SME is obligated to inform the regional ET2SMEs partner immediately. The ET2SMEs project partners will decide on the situation and inform the Lead SME on the impact on the voucher and how to proceed.

5.4 Final Evaluation & Payment

After realization of the provable deliverables and herewith the completion of the project, though before the specified end date of the project, the **Final Evaluation Report** is submitted to request payment of the voucher. The template of the Final Evaluation Report is available via the ET2SMEs website. The Lead SME sends the appropriate and completed form by email to the regional ET2SMEs partner. The last date for submission of the Final Evaluation Report is 31.03.23.

After receipt, the Final Evaluation Report is checked and proof of achievement of the predefined deliverables is assessed.

The regional ET2SMEs will complete, sign and return the Final Evaluation Report, with the result of the assessment; whether or not the deliverables were realized and successfully assessed.

In case of irregularities in the final evaluation or in the realization or proof of the deliverables, the Lead SME is requested for fulfilment within a period of maximum 4 weeks.

Only complete fulfilment of the deliverables and approval of the final evaluation entail a **payment** of the voucher. The Lead SME will receive a **Confirmation Letter** with the result of the final evaluation, that includes the statement that the deliverables were realized, assessed and how they were assessed, and that payment of the specified voucher contribution will be done to the bank account of the lead SME.

The payment of the voucher is conducted by the regional ET2SMEs partner. The Lead SME receiving the payment is responsible for and takes care of a correct distribution of the payment among the eligible SME's involved in the consortium, as defined in the Application Form.

After payment, the regional ET2SMEs partner send a State Aid Notification to the Lead SME, that the company must archive for its accountancy.

6 Miscellaneous

- All documents and forms related to the voucher scheme are available on www.et2smes.eu;
- Only one voucher is granted per SME, per consortium and per innovation project;
- An assigned voucher is non-transferable to another entity;
- The regional ET2SMEs partners can support consortia with the application process;
- Any agreements between the consortium partners with regards to the cooperation, for example on intellectual property or responsibilities, can and, when considered necessary, shall be formalized in a separate cooperation agreement;
- Beneficiaries of the voucher commit to support and participate in promotional activities and communication about ET2SMEs;
- All information given by the beneficiary SME's to ET2SMEs partners is deemed confidential and will not be disseminated without prior consent of the SME.



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- For communication purposes, the ET2SMEs partners may write and disseminate publicity articles related to the activities funded by vouchers. These articles will not contain any confidential information;
- The ET2SMEs project partners reserve the right to adapt the voucher scheme to changed circumstances and/or insights during the duration of ET2SMEs without stating reasons. This without infringing on the rights and obligations of the beneficiaries with support already granted.

7 Information

More information about ET2SMEs, as well as the appropriate documents and forms on the voucher scheme, and the contact details of the regional ET2SMEs project partners are published on www.et2smes.eu.

The ET2SMEs project is carried out under the Interreg V-A Euregio Meuse-Rhine Programme, with € 1.15 million from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). By investing EU funds in Interreg projects, the European Union invests directly in economic development, innovation, territorial development, social inclusion and education in the Euregio Meuse-Rhine.



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