*BioTech2Agri - Biotechnological innovation for sustainable and competitive agriculture*

# Innovation support mechanism Guidelines

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| **Abstract of the deliverable** | *English-language document containing procedures to be followed by all partners: providing appropriate support/mentoring to potential beneficiaries of the call; managing the call; evaluation procedure; support to be provided to beneficiaries in coordination with partners who will provide services* |

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# 1. BioTech2Agri Impact

The BioTech2Agri project aims to foster a culture of innovation and collaboration among research centers, innovation hubs, and enterprises in the agrifood sector. By creating a sustainable cross-border ecosystem, the initiative promotes the application of biotechnology solutions in key areas such as agriculture, food production, nutraceuticals, and other related sectors. This focus on increasing R&D investments, technological advancements, and applied research will lead to the development of new products and processes, driving economic growth and boosting regional competitiveness.

# 2. Environmental and Economic Impact

The BioTech2Agri project emphasizes both environmental sustainability and economic impact as core principles of its intervention logic. The innovative biotechnological solutions promoted by the project enable the targeted and validated use of plant biomass for high-value applications across multiple sectors. These applications include the enrichment of food and feed products with essential nutrients, the development of dietary supplements and novel foods, and the creation of nutraceutical products that provide health benefits beyond basic nutrition.

Furthermore, the technology facilitated by the project supports the development of cosmetic products that harness the power of active compounds extracted from plants, offering natural and sustainable alternatives for body care solutions. In the agritech sector, the project promotes the development of products that aim to enhance soil quality and fertility, contributing to more sustainable agricultural practices.

One of the most innovative aspects of BioTech2Agri lies in the technology's ability to propagate small plant parts in soil-free environments. This approach leads to greater efficiency and sustainability, allowing us to produce adequate volumes of plant biomass without the need for traditional cultivation. This method conserves natural resources such as soil and water, reduces the use of pesticides, and minimizes waste generation.

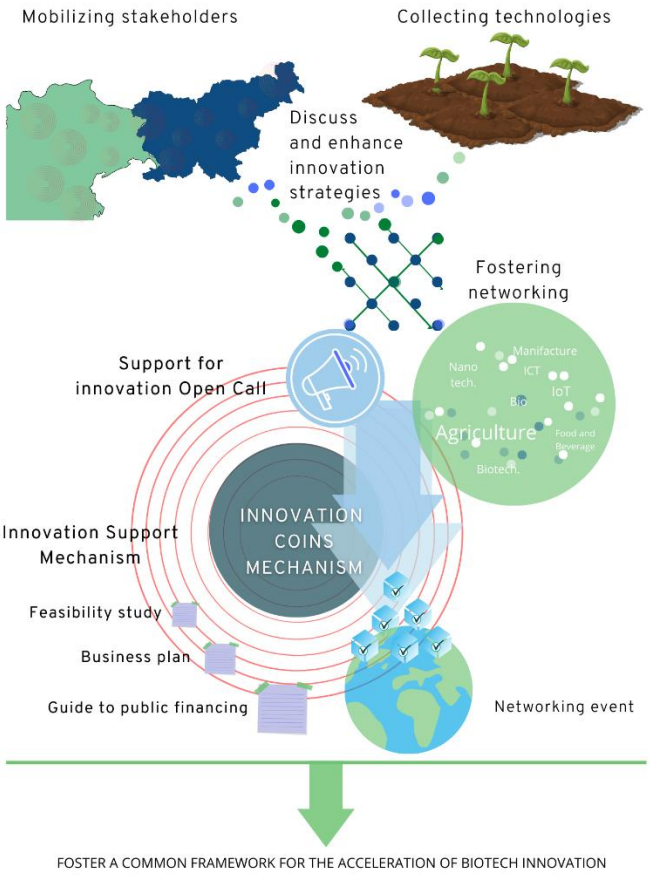
In addition to its environmental benefits, the project has the potential to generate significant economic impacts. By supporting the development and commercialization of new biotech-driven products and processes, BioTech2Agri will create opportunities for job creation and stimulate local economic growth. The project focuses on fostering cross-border cooperation between Italian and Slovenian SMEs, further strengthens regional economic ties and facilitates the exchange of knowledge and best practices.

BioTech2Agri also aims to implement a 'win-win' policy in which a portion of the economic proceeds generated through the project is reinvested into the conservation of flora and habitats. By establishing agreements and implementing activities that directly benefit the environment and local communities, the project seeks to promote a long-term positive spillover effect on the territory. This integrated approach ensures that both economic development and environmental conservation are mutually reinforced, creating a legacy of sustainability and prosperity for future generations.

## 3. Expected Outcomes

The expected outcomes of the BioTech2Agri project are ambitious and far-reaching. At least 20 SMEs from Italy (Veneto, Friuli Venezia Giulia) and 20 SMEs from Slovenia will be actively engaged and supported in implementing biotech solutions. A cross-border biotech ecosystem will be established, connecting SMEs, research centers, development agencies, and industry stakeholders. By enhancing local competencies in the agrifood sector through training, knowledge exchange, and capacity-building activities, the project aims to facilitate the development of innovative products and processes that can drive economic growth and promote the sustainable use of natural resources.

# 4. Key Features of the "Innovation Coins" Mechanism




The Innovation Support Mechanism (ISM) for BioTech2Agri aims to transfer innovation into the agrifood sector by leveraging biotechnological solutions. The project focuses on the use of plant biomass for high-value applications, such as nutraceuticals, cosmetics, and agritech products, with an emphasis on efficiency and sustainability.

This mechanism serves as a catalyst for fostering cross-border collaboration, promoting sustainable practices, and driving technological innovation across the agrifood value chain. The main goals of the mechanism are:

a. to strengthen connections between Italian and Slovenian SMEs, facilitating the creation of cross-border partnerships and promoting shared economic benefits.
b. to create a replicable model for biotech innovation that can be applied across different regions, ensuring ongoing benefits for the agrifood sector.

A key component of BioTech2Agri is the ***"Support for innovation Open Call"***, which is designed to provide targeted support to SMEs through a competitive open call process. Selected SMEs will receive the following pack of services:

| ***SERVICE 1*** | ***SERVICE 2*** | ***SERVICE 3*** | ***SERVICE 4*** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Preliminary feasibility analysis | Business hypotheses - Market potential | Access credit guide - funding opportunities | Matchmaking event |
| "SME beneficiary" has the opportunity for his or her product "transformation" idea to be analyzed and given a prospect for its realization | a business plan concept that defines a hypothesis of one's business according to step 1 output | A guide to where and which European, national and regional funding available to support SME beneficiary idea | the opportunity to participate in a cross-border networking event to encourage connection with its other market activities and not necessarily from the same industry, thus to encourage the possible renewal of its value chain. |

## 5. Introduction of the Open Call for Innovation Support to SMEs

The 'Support for Innovation Open Call' is an initiative designed to provide financial support and resources to SMEs that wish to embrace and integrate new agricultural technologies into their production processes or the development of innovative products. Since the call provides a pack of service that can give a competitive advantage to the SMEs that benefit from it, the ISM falls under state aid. To communicate the amount of state aid in each State Aid Register the Consortium must define an economical amount for the pack of services. The pack of service cannot be worth more than 22,000 EUR. To comply with state aid regulations the consortium must notify the amount of the value of services offered on the National State Aid Register. Venetian Cluster will be responsible for notifying state aid in the Italian State Aid Register called "RNA – Registro Nazionale degli Aiuti di stato" for Italian and Slovenian SMEs. To do this, ROD (the Lead Partner) will need to give delegation to Venetian Cluster to operate on its behalf on the RNA portal, as the portal is only in Italian language. The LP will be in charge of requesting information from Slovenian SMEs that Venetian Cluster needs to carry out its task. The receipt of applications to the Innovation Coin Call will be centered on a single partner, namely Venetian Cluster. During the two months the call will remain open, Venetian cluster will periodically update the consortium on the number of applications received.

During the evaluation process the Consortium must consider that the release of aid must be subject to verification that the recipient has not received, and subsequently not repaid or deposited in a blocked account, aid subject to recovery because of a previous Commission decision declaring the aid illegal and incompatible with the market.

**Timeline:**

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| **Call Duration:** 2 months. |
| **Evaluation and Selection:** 15 days |
| **Signing GA with SMEs:** 15 days |
| **Support Delivery:** 7/8 months |

## 6. Role of Partners

The success of ISM relies on the active and coordinated participation of all partners.

**Venetian Cluster**, in its role as a *Business Support Organisation (BSO)*, would undertake the following key responsibilities:

**Strategic Coordination and Leadership:** Ensuring the overall coordination of ISM activities, providing strategic leadership in mentoring, and overseeing evaluation processes to guarantee the achievement of ISM objectives.

**Innovation Coins Mechanism Development:** Establishing and operationalizing the Innovation Coins mechanism to incentivize innovation and collaboration among participants. This will include setting up a transparent distribution process and defining usage guidelines to maximize impact.

**Open Call Design and Implementation:** Designing and launching the Call for Expression of Interest for Biotechnology Suppliers in the field of INTERREG IT-SLO BioTech2Agri, designing and launching Innovation Open Call for SMEs, defining selection criteria, managing the evaluation process; guiding Consortium partners in supporting selected projects and thus beneficiaries, which are the SMEs.

**FAB FVG and ZRS KOPER,** acting as *scientific partners*, will deliver:

**Comprehensive Data Collection and Analysis:** Developing robust report of data gathered from diverse sources to support evidence-based decision-making and potential SMEs interested in the Innovation Coin pack of services. The data will provide information on project strategies and ensure alignment with regional innovation priorities.

**Database Development and Management:** Designing and maintaining dynamic, user-friendly databases that centralize project-relevant information, facilitating efficient data access and knowledge sharing among partners, stakeholders and SMEs on available biotechnologies in Slovenia and Italy.

**Networking and Collaboration Facilitation – the 4Helix in Action task:** Organizing networking activities such as workshops to strengthen interregional collaboration and foster knowledge exchange.

**ROD and INFORMEST,** acting as *public entities and technological experts*, will focus on:

**Innovative Policy Design and Development:** Crafting tailored policy recommendations that address regional innovation needs, ensuring alignment with EU strategic frameworks and local development priorities.

**Facilitation of Participatory Processes:** Leading participatory processes that involve stakeholders at all levels to ensure inclusive and transparent policy formulation. Techniques such as co-creation workshops, stakeholder consultations and a transnational matchmaking event for SMEs will be employed.

**Policy Adoption and Institutional Alignment**: Supporting the adoption of newly developed policies through close collaboration with regional authorities and institutions, ensuring policy coherence and institutional buy-in.

**PTP,** acting as a *technological and capacity building expert*, will focus on:

**Capacity Building and Skill Enhancement:** Designing and delivering targeted capacity-building programs aimed at enhancing the skills and competencies of stakeholders. This will include training sessions, knowledge-transfer activities, and the development of best-practice guidelines.

**All Partners** will contribute to:

**Support the overall implementation of specific tasks to partners having leadership on specific actions.**

**Local and Regional Dissemination**: Conducting outreach activities to ensure broad dissemination of project results at local and regional levels. This includes organizing public events, leveraging media channels, and producing multilingual dissemination materials.

**Technical Mentoring and Expertise Sharing:** Providing specialized technical mentoring to stakeholders, leveraging regional expertise to address sector-specific challenges and opportunities.

**Regional Expertise and Knowledge Sharing**: Facilitating the exchange of regional insights and best practices through collaborative platforms and peer-learning activities.

**Networking and Ecosystem Development:** Promoting interregional networking opportunities and building sustainable partnerships among stakeholders, thus fostering a robust and interconnected innovation ecosystem.

# 7. Innovation support Mechanism step-by-step

## TIMELINE

| ACTIVITIES | PPs in charge | TIMELINE - MONTHS | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | JANUARY | FEBRUARY | MARCH | APRIL | MAY | JUNE | JULY | AUGUST | SEPTEMBER | OCTOBER | NOVEMBER | DECEMBER |
| Support mechanism start up phase | COO VHC + All PPs | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Open call for interest - suppliers | COO VHC + All PPs | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Evaluation and publication list suppliers | COO VHC + All PPs | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Event (see D2.1.1) | COO VHC + All PPs | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Open Call for SMEs | COO VHC + All PPs | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Closure call for SMEs | COO VHC + All PPs | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Evaluation 40 Proposals | COO VHC + All PPs | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Publication list and signing of grants | COO VHC + All PPs | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 40 projects implementation and monitoring | COO VHC + All PPs | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Service 1 - Preliminary feasibility analysis | PP3 ZRS Koper, PP4 FAB FVG e PP2 VHC (subcontractor ABRES) | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Service 2 - Market potential | PP6 PTP, with support of PP2 VHC | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Service 3 - Funding guide | PP2 VHC e PP5 INFORMEST | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Service 4 - Networking event | PP5 INFORMEST e PP6 PTP | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Support mechanism ending phase | COO VHC + All PPs | | | | | | | | | | | | |

### - Step 1: Call Dissemination

Each partner is responsible for translating and disseminating the open call in their respective regions. This includes using local communication channels, organizing informational events, and ensuring that SMEs have access to all relevant materials.

### - Step 2: Pre-Call Support

Potential beneficiaries should receive mentoring and guidance before submitting their proposals. This includes helping them understand the objectives of the BioTech2Agri project, clarifying eligibility requirements, and providing support in the preparation of their applications.

### - Step 3: Application Submission

The call will remain open for a period of two months. During this time, SMEs can submit their applications, which should include a detailed description of the proposed biotech solution and its potential impact.

### - Step 4: Evaluation Process

A standardized evaluation process will be applied, focusing on criteria such as technical feasibility, economic sustainability, and cross-border impact. The evaluation committee, led by Venetian Cluster, will review all proposals in collaboration with representatives from all partner organizations.

**- Step 5: Selection and Agreement**

Selected beneficiaries will be notified and asked to sign an agreement outlining the support to be provided through the ISM. This includes feasibility studies, business plan development, funding guidance, and access to cross-border networking opportunities.

**- Step 6: Implementation Support**

Throughout the implementation phase, beneficiaries will receive ongoing support from partners responsible for technical assistance, mentoring, and monitoring. Regular progress reviews will be conducted to ensure that projects remain on track.

**- Step 7: Reporting and Knowledge Sharing**

Partners will document best practices, lessons learned, and project outcomes. This information will be shared across the network to promote continuous improvement and the replication of successful initiatives in other regions.

**- Step 8: Evaluation and Follow-Up**

At the end of the support period, an impact assessment will be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the ISM. Feedback from beneficiaries will be collected to inform future interactions of the support mechanism.

# 8. Procedures and Partner Coordination

**Designing ISM, coordinated by Venetian Cluster, support the development of the documentation:**

| Requested to SME/Produced by consortium | Documents | Content explanation |
|---|---|---|
| | **Administrative, Legal Documents and financial documents** | |
| Produced by Consortium | Call doc | see call contents |
| Produced by Consortium | Declaration | of Absence of Conflicts of Interest; Self-Certification of Compliance with Eligibility Requirements; No Grounds for Exclusion |
| Produced by Consortium | Declaration of State Aid | To ensure compliance with state aid regulations. |
| Requested to SME | Chamber of Commerce Registration (Company Extract) | To prove the legal existence of the company or entity. |
| Requested to SME | Certificate of Compliance with Social Security and Tax Obligations (DURC) | To confirm tax regularity. |
| | | |
| | **Technical and Project Documents** | |
| Produced by Consortium | Application form | project description (questions will guide SME); innovation plan; biotech provider |
| Requested to SME | Project Description – A detailed document outlining objectives, methodologies, and expected impacts. | outlining: idea, sector, technology provider, objectives, methodologies, and expected impacts |
| Requested to SME | Innovation Plan | explaining the innovative contribution inside SME business |
| | | |
| | **Evaluation and Selection Documents** | |
| Produced by Consortium | Declaration of Acceptance of the Call's Terms and Conditions – Signed by the legal representative. | signed by all evaluators (2 for each partner) |
| Produced by Consortium | Checklist | Excel doc with administrative and quality assessment |
| Produced by Consortium | Approval minutes | Template in word |
| | | |
| | **Post-Selection Documents** | |
| Produced by Consortium | GANTT + Service checklist | To document the services implementation status. |
| Produced by Consortium | Monitoring and Reporting Plan | Details on how results will be measured. |
| Produced by Consortium * | Grant Agreement | Declaration of Acceptance of the Call's Terms and Conditions – Signed by the legal representative.; ***signed between Italian/Slovenian COO partner and SME** |
| Requested to SME | Progress Report | Monitoring and reporting plan, that will be a document that will provide the project's implementation status. |

**Providing Support/Mentoring:** All partners will provide appropriate support and mentoring to potential beneficiaries of the call. This includes assisting with proposal development, technical guidance, and clarifying project objectives.

- **Managing the Call:** The call will be managed collaboratively, with each partner responsible for local dissemination and engagement with SMEs. The Venetian Cluster will oversee the coordination of the call to ensure consistency.

- **Evaluation Procedure:** A standardized evaluation process will be applied, focusing on technical feasibility, economic sustainability, and potential cross-border impact. The Venetian Cluster will lead the evaluation committee, with input from all partners.

- **Support to Beneficiaries:** Support will be provided to selected beneficiaries through coordinated efforts. This includes the delivery of feasibility studies, business plan concepts, funding guidance, and facilitation of cross-border networking events.

- **Coordination with Service Providers**: Partners responsible for providing specific services, such as technical assistance and mentoring, will work closely with beneficiaries to ensure successful implementation of the proposed solutions.