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INNOBIOVC

DELIVERABLE D1.3.3

IEC24: IEC call documents and procedures

Summary

This deliverable contains the procedures that started from the finished call documents, focusing on the joint application form, communication and project development. The application form and Q&A can be found in the annex.

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@InnoBioVC, 2023



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

B2B	Business to Business
BizUP	Business Upper Austria
CBE	Circular Bioeconomy
IE2C4	Innovation Express 2024
IECS	Innovation Express Call Scheme
LGCA	Lombardy Green Chemistry Association
PLA	Polylactic Acid
SAT	Sustainability Assessment Tool
S3	Smart Specialization Strategy
TRL	Technology Readiness Level
VCG	Value Chain Generator
VCG.AI	Value Chain Generator AI



1 INTRODUCTION

Innovation Express Call 2024 is a joint call for proposals implemented within the frame of the INNOBIOVC project by synchronizing existing regional funding schemes in the Alpine Space and beyond. It represents a joint approach for supporting companies, especially SMEs, at international matchmaking and joint research, development and innovation projects in the fields of trans-regional circular bioeconomy value chains, key resources and sectors in agriculture, food and beverages, chemistry, polymers and energy.

Synchronizing of existing regional funding programmes under the IEC24 means:

- Regions participate with their own, existing regional funding programmes.
- No new or additional funding schemes have to be established.
- No new or additional funding budget is needed.
- Participating regions remain in full control of their administrative procedures, financial management of the call as well as the decision-making process.
- Funding and eligibility rules apply according to the regional funding programme.
- Applications will be evaluated based on their potential to create benefits for participating applicants, to contribute to the competitiveness of the regional economy and in accordance with the criteria from the respective regional/national funding programmes.
- New cooperations with partners/regions which have competences one needs and others can offer.
- Innovative collaboration offers are supported financially.

The participating funding programme owners agreed on the thematic scope, the call text and the call duration in several online meetings. Three Webinars (19.12.23, 17.01.24, 08.02.24) were organized and hosted by the coordination office team to synchronize the possible funding programmes and to inform and connect the owners. Altogether there were 73 participants from 6 countries (AUT, GER, SUI, ITA, SLO, FRA) and the Baltic Sea Region. The coordination office wrote the call documents, and the regional partner and funding programme owners had several possibilities to review the document. If necessary, the coordination office team also facilitated bilateral meetings to answer questions of interested regions or programme owners. This report focuses on the procedures that started from the finished call documents (see Annex).



2 PROCEDURE

The coordination of the IEC24 procedures was managed by the virtual IEC24 coordination office, run by Business Upper Austria and closely coordinated with the lead and all other project partners and funding programme managers. The main part of the procedures was communication, dissemination and project development work. The coordination office prepared content for the websites and social media, organized the webinar series to inform interested parties and applicants and coordinated and initiated meetings between possible consortia to help develop the projects. The detailed procedures and action can be found in the following chapters.

The virtual IEC24 coordination office (IEC24 CO)

- is operated in co-operation between Business Upper Austria (PP) and WFG Heilbronn (PL) within the INNOBIOVC Project and serves as a central point of contact for questions and communication.
- promotes the IEC24, informs interested applicants and manages the IEC24 website www.IEC24.info.
- supports participating regions in the application and implementation of IEC24.
- arranges coordination meetings (if required) between the respective programme managers.
- organises several (virtual) events to present the call, network potential applicants and support project development (dates: see www.IEC24.info)
- Contact: Iris Reingruber/Business Upper Austria, iris.reingruber@biz-up.at



3 COMMUNICATION & DISSEMINATION

In addition to the monthly INNOBIOVC calls the communication team met once a month for an online communication call. One of the first milestones was the set-up of the **iec24.info website** and the preparation of the content. The social media that was used for the project was LinkedIn (63 Followers), where the advisory board members, invitations and agenda for the IEC24 webinars and other news and project ideas were posted. Members of the Advisory Board were engaged as Keynote speaker, multipliers and featured on social media. News and information was also updated on the [INNOBIOVC - Alpine Space Programme \(alpine-space.eu\)](http://alpine-space.eu) with links to the www.iec24.info website. The project partners incl. Brandenburg sent press releases or included the project activities in their newsletter and websites.

3.1 Website: IEC24.INFO

During the coordination of the call text, the coordination office and the team from WFG Heilbronn launched the IEC24 Website: www.iec24.info

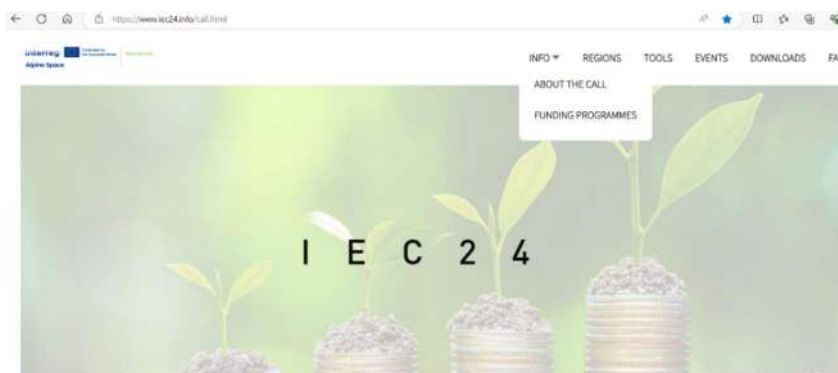


Figure 1: Banner of the IEC24.info website

The website management and creation was led by WFG Heilbronn, while the team from Business Upper Austria prepared information and content with the support of the other regions. Business Upper Austria defined the requirements needed based on their previous experience and WFG Heilbronn implemented those requirements.

The website was organised in six sections:

- **Info:** this section contains the call text and the information about the participating funding programs
- **Regions:** every participating region is described, cluster networks, areas of expertise
- **Tools:** the Value Chain Generator® (VCG), Sustainability Assessment Tool (SAT) and the matchmaking tool are described. Possible project applicants can register for a free trial of the Value Chain Generator®, download the SAT tool or register for the matchmaking tool. There is also a decision tree, that can be used to help call applicants to understand in which stage of development which tool could support them best.
- **Events:** in this section, all of the webinars (past and upcoming) can be found, potential participants can register for the events.
- **Downloads:** several factsheets (in English and German), the call text (in English and German), the IEC24 joint application summary form and the project pitches/ideas can be downloaded from this section.



- **Frequently asked questions (FAQ):** Several questions regarding the application process, the project development and the according answer can be found here. A complete list of the FAQs is included in **Chapter 6 - Annexes**.

3.2 Inclusion of VCG.ai und SAT Tool in IEC24

The VCG.ai and the SAT tool were embedded in the IEC24 procedures. Both of them were featured on social media and were introduced during the IEC24-webinar series for applicants (described in the subsequent section). They can also be found on the IEC24 website, including a decision tree, that offers help on when and where in the application process or project development stage each tool is useful.

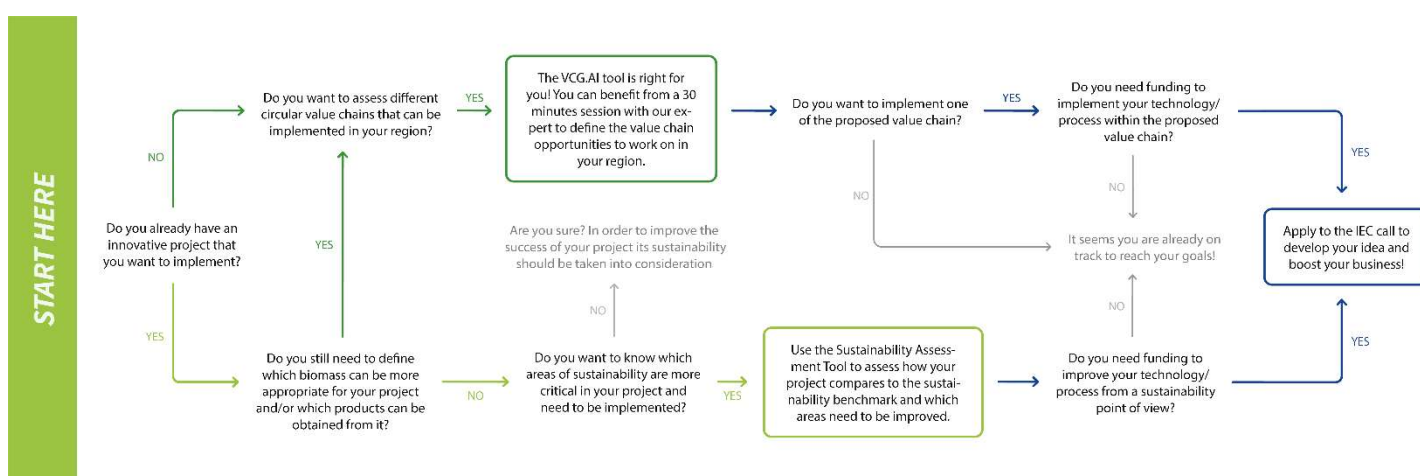


Figure 2: Decision tree for IEC24 applicants, to facilitate choosing the fitting tool

3.3 IEC24-Webinar Series for applicants

As soon as the call text was finished and agreed upon the participating funding schemes, a “Kick-off” webinar for the Innovation Express Call 2024 was set up. Following this initial event, a webinar series was organised to inform, and support interested parties. Four public webinars were hosted by the coordination office for potential participants, programme owners and business support organisations. Altogether, there were 113 participants from five countries (AUT, GER, SUI, ITA, SLO) and stakeholder groups like SMEs and large-scale companies, business support organisations and intermediates, research and development as well as policy makers and funding programme owners joining the webinars. Besides the kick-off meeting, the webinars were enhanced with a keynote presentation to highlight different aspects of bioeconomy for the IEC24 applicants. Throughout the course of the webinars, 6 project ideas in the frame of circular bioeconomy were pitched by different organisations. The pitched projects including the project development process are described in Chapter 4. The coordination office used the webinars to guide possible applicants through the structure of the call. Inputs and presentations included the call topic, the application process, matchmaking, the VCG.ai and SAT Tool as well as project development and a Q&A-session.



After the event, a summary of the most important information and the keynote and project pitch presentations were sent out to the mailing list of interested people (120 contacts that either took part once, wanted to be informed or had contact with the coordination office in another way).



Figure 3: Event calendar containing the date, keynote speaker and registration link to the webinars

Except for the kick-off meeting the major framework of the webinars followed the same frame (Welcome, Keynote, project pitch, matchmaking, Q&A). As an example, the agenda for the Kick-off webinar on 13.03.2024 is given below.

AGENDA of the Kick-off Webinar

- 10:15 Opening of virtual meeting
- 10:30 Welcome
- 10:35 IEC24 Overview
- 10:45 IEC24 Thematic Fields of the Call, VCG.AI & SAT
- 11:15 Participating Regions & Potential Partners
- 11:30 IEC24 Application procedure
- 11:45 Project Development & Match Making Support

Ascryption matchmaking tool for facilitated project partner search

In the Matchmaking tool you can search for potential project partners, companies, clusters and more. You can enter your profile and tell us what you are looking for in your profile section. If you want to post specific requests, you can do so via a “Marketplace”. There is a message function to write to other partners and you can request meetings at the given dates & times of the Matchmaking events. Those dates & times you can find under the event section on this page. At the end of the project, there were 27 active users registered on the IEC24 matchmaking tool. The tool can be accessed via the following link: [Home | INNOBIOVC \(ascrion.com\)](https://ascrion.com)



4 PROJECT DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE IEC24

During the IEC24 Webinar series, people and organisations were invited to pitch their projects and project ideas to the audience to find new partners and to promote their projects. The ideas that were pitched reached from topics like “utilisation of organic waste by red algae” and “conversion of excess heat from pyrolysis plants” to the “use of fruit peels for bioplastic production”. The coordination office team then searched for potential interested companies and project partners and set up several coordination meetings between the parties to see if there can be found a suitable consortium for the IEC24. One project idea was found via a newsletter from another organization and one company contacted the coordination office as a response to a VCG.ai workshop the BizUP advertised within the food cluster network. They were looking for a solution to optimize their waste management. Due to the protection of content, the complete project summaries were not included in this deliverable. An overview of all projects is included in Table 1.

Utilisation of organic waste by red algae

A biorefinery is integrated into a waste disposal system, resulting in a reduction in organic waste (up to 80% less), valuable raw materials (protein, carbohydrates, pigments) are provided and a lower nitrogen load in the fermentation residue is reached.

Hydrocyanic acid reduction & press cake utilisation

The hydrocyanic acid content in commercially available products such as poppy seeds or linseed is still too high. The aim of the project is to search for solutions to reduce the hydrocyanic acid content and analyse new recycling options for previously unusable waste streams.

Paper instead of plastic - the better alternative?

The aim of this project is to develop recyclable packaging solutions made of paper and plastic, to develop the most ecological solution from an overall solution and to test its feasibility.

Utilisation/conversion of excess heat from pyrolysis plants

The use of biochar as a soil additive is a technology for permanent carbon sequestration in the soil. The production of biochar is based on the pyrolysis of biomass. The aim of the proposed project is to find a way to use the waste heat from the pyrolysis process for producing energy.

Development and application of bioplastics made from polybutylene succinate

General topic and possibilities presented by Fraunhofer Institut für applied polymer science

Fruit peels waste valorisations

The project aims to use fermentation technology to produce bioplastics from fruit peel residues from fruit salad processing, which in turn are used to produce packaging for fruit and vegetable products.



Utilisation of thermal side streams for land-based cultivation of marine vegetables

The project idea is to utilise brine sources for the cultivation of seaweed. The existing small-scale test facility for algae production is to be expanded to include larger units and the use of the various brine streams (e.g. raw brine, pure brine, waste brine) and other residual material streams (e.g. waste heat) for the cultivation and further use of various saline organisms is to be analysed.

Table 1: Overview of all pitched and developed projects within the IEC24

Title	Organization	Region	Activities and involved parties	Result for IEC24
Utilisation of organic waste by red algae	Institut für Lebensmittel- und Umweltforschung, ILU	Brandenburg	Several online meeting with ILU, idea forwarded to suitable food cluster members	No partners were found within the timeframe of the IEC24
Hydrocyanic acid reduction & press cake utilisation	Lebensmittel-Cluster	Upper Austria	Online meetings with possible partners	Consortium only from Upper Austria
Paper instead of plastic - the better alternative?	Lebensmittel-Cluster	Upper Austria	Online meetings with possible partners	Consortium only from Upper Austria
Utilisation/conversion of excess heat from pyrolysis plants	Illecker Systems	Upper Austria	Contact with Bavarian company	No partners were found within the timeframe of the IEC24
Development and application of bioplastics made from polybutylene succinate	Fraunhofer Institut für Angewandte Polymerforschung	Brandenburg	Several meetings with Fraunhofer and acib GmbH, mironzell fein & frisch AG, forwarded to suitable food cluster members	Most promising project with existing application and consortium, Upper Austrian partner not found in time
Fruit peels waste valorisations	Acib GmbH	Austria		Not feasible within the IEC24
Utilisation of thermal side streams for land-based cultivation of marine vegetables	Bad Saarow Kur GmbH	Brandenburg	Forwarded to companies in Upper Austria	Most promising project with existing application, timeframe was not suitable
Wanted: optimization of waste management	Weinbergmaier GmbH	Upper Austria	Meeting with company to find out more about the problem	No suitable solution was found



5 LEARNINGS AND FEEDBACK FROM FUNDING PROGRAMMES, BUSINESS SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS AND IEC24 APPLICANTS

- **Networking across regions: a basis for future cooperation was created**

The IEC24 created a valuable basis for networking across regions. Regions that had never spoken to each other before were brought together. Companies that did not yet know each other were connected. Awareness was created and there was an occasion to talk to each other.

- **Possibility to try new things**

Projects like INNOBIOVC and the IEC24 are a great opportunity to try new and challenging themes. The collaboration between different EU regions on this practical level is certainly challenging. The project provides valuable feedback for upcoming projects and new collaboration efforts which are necessary for a common future.

- **The size of companies:**

Innovative ideas with value chains that reach across borders often need certain amounts of production quantities. Some of the ideas only work with bigger sized companies and no suitable small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs) could be found and most of the funding programmes require SMEs.

- **Formal requirements of funding programmes:**

In one case, the project idea was very promising and there was a company with exactly the food waste that was needed for the project willing to take part. In the end the funding program was not suitable, because it is required that the company produces something and not only delivers the resource.

- **Bioeconomy and circularity as a concept**

Bio- and circular economy are concepts that are not yet established in the minds of companies. The topics often are very hard to grasp. Therefore, translation from one level to another must be provided and there is a high demand for support needed.

- **Timeframe and budget of funding programmes**

Although it was quite certain that Baden-Württemberg would take part in the call, due to budget cuts in the region, there was no suitable funding programme that could participate in the call. These circumstances also played a part in the delayed start of the call.

- **Affinity for innovation & visionary personalities**

Being willing to walk into new lands, cooperate with companies from other fields and try something new takes a lot of courage. Companies who are willing to take the risk to try something out of everyday business need personalities with an affinity for innovation and visions.



- **Bureaucracy and applications**

In contrast to scientific institutions, companies, especially smaller companies, are unfamiliar to the procedure of applications which is not part of their daily business. Therefore, the higher bureaucracy combined with a limited timeframe is a limiting factor.

- **Project development from scratch**

The coordination office not only had to coordinate and support project enquiries, but really look for project ideas, search for possible partners and get the development going. Project development from scratch does not only take time, but also requires personal qualities like connections, sales qualities, expertise in the field, translation between science and business. It also takes a long time to build up contact with companies when there was no connection before. Therefore, active initiative from all participating regions is necessary to initiate such challenging and cross-regional projects.

- **Cultural/ethic aspects**

There was feedback that the food industry is very hesitant about talking about their waste. Food waste is a topic that is discussed in the media a lot and companies don't want to talk about the amount of food waste openly. Therefore, it is difficult to develop projects that use food waste as a new resource in the value chain.

- **There are two different kinds of biogenic residues**

The experience in project development from food side streams showed that there are two different kinds of food waste: side streams connected to the product (e.g. not edible parts like peels, shells, kernels, bran) and waste connected to the production process (e.g. surpluses, spoilt or inappropriate products, machine errors, cut-offs, etc.). Building up new and innovative business models is great for the first kind, but the waste from the production process could and should be reduced by increasing efficiency. This is why companies do not want to invest in a business model when their goal is to reduce the resource.

- **Duration of the call and the project**

The duration should have been not a problem, but call start was delayed (waiting for the decision of Baden-Württemberg) and the projects had to be developed from scratch with a lot of effort from the regional partners. If there would have been further developed projects, the time frame would have been reasonable. Also, the end of the call during the summer month was a challenge itself.

- **Participating regions**

The call lives from the regions that are participating. If there are more regions, the options to find suitable companies for a special innovation project are better and the call will be more attractive for applicants.



6 ANNEXES

Frequently Asked Questions from the IEC24.info website

There was also a **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)** section created, which helped to communicate within the consortium and also offered a quick possibility for applicants to find answers to their questions. The complete list of FAQs can be found in the attachment.

Who can apply for the funding?

To be eligible for funding, the applicants must be located within IEC24 participating regions. Funding and eligibility rules apply according to the regional funding program of the applicant's regions. All entities which are eligible according to the regulations of their regional funding programme can apply for funding. Innovation Express 2024 targets SMEs, research organizations, technology providers, large companies, universities, research centres, etc.

Does my company have to be located in one of the participating regions?

Eligible applicants are located within a geographical area where an Innovation Express 2024 funding partner is present.

Which benefits does the IEC24 have compared to my regional funding programme?

The big benefit for you is, that you gain extra-regional know-how for your project which you might locally miss. In collaboration with partner(s) from abroad you enter new markets and networks. You can choose one from another region that might be specialized in your anticipated field and is placed closer – even across the border – than another regional one.

In which language do I have to write the application?

There are two parts that must be handed in by the applicants:

- 1) IEC24 Joint Application Summary – this should generally be written in English. Since only German speaking regions participate the IEC24 the joint application summary can be written in German.
- 2) Separate Regional Application – this should be written in your regional language (e.g. German)

How long does the application process take?

The application process follows the process of your regional funding programme. You can get information about that from the coordination office or the contact of your regional funding programme.

How many partners do I need to be able to apply?

Proposed activities must include the participation of at least 2 partners from 2 different partner regions. (The participation of even more partners is strongly recommended.) The composition of the project consortia has to correspond to the regulations of the regional funding programme you apply.

Can I apply as a single company, do I need partners at all?

IEC24 supports collaborative projects with at least 2 different partners from 2 IEC24 partner regions. A project with one single partner and without another partner from another region does not belong to the IEC24 supported projects (there is no need for IEC24 support).

Will my partner and I get the same funding?

Not necessarily. As you each apply for different funding programmes, the programmes might have different regulations e.g. in case of funding rate and eligible expenses. For example, travel costs are included in the funding programme you are applying but they are not included in the programme of your collaborating partner organization.

Do I have to have a partner from one of the participating regions?

Proposed activities must include the participation of at least 2 partners from 2 different partner or participating regions. IEC24 is a joint call for proposals implemented by synchronizing existing regional funding schemes in the Alpine Space and beyond. Potential interested funding partners shall contact the IEC24 Coordination Office.

How do I find a partner for my project?

If you are still looking for a collaboration partner you can join a matchmaking event, contact the IEC24 Coordination Office or take look at the section “Regions” at this website for cluster information and contacts as well as business support agencies in the IEC24 participating regions.

When should I contact the IEC24 Coordination Office?

It is recommended that you contact the coordination office as soon as you have an idea in mind or thinking about applying for the IEC24 in order to talk about your idea and see if it fits to the scope of the call. The coordination office can also support further development of your idea and arrange useful contacts e.g. for finding suitable partners.

How can I reach the IEC24 Coordination Office?

The IEC24 Coordination Office is “virtual” office. It is operated in co-operation between Business Upper Austria and WFG Heilbronn within the INNOBIOVC project. You can contact Iris Reingruber at Business Upper Austria via mail: iris.reingruber@biz-up.at or telephone: +43 732 79810 5095.