

BIOEAST Open Innovation Challenge

APPLICATION GUIDELINES

1. BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

The BIOEAST Open Innovation Challenge (OIC) is a collaborative initiative, and a unique platform designed to accelerate bioeconomy innovation across the BIOEAST macro-region in key bioeconomy sectors.

The OIC brings together bioeconomy hubs and clusters, leading companies and start-ups, universities, researchers, students, and talented individuals to drive meaningful impact.

The BIOEAST HUBs – national collaborative platforms that gather key bioeconomy stakeholders – have identified key problems to overcome, and opportunities to realise for the development of a sustainable bioeconomy in Central and Eastern Europe. These have been grouped into eight key themes, each focusing on specific issues that need to be addressed. Innovators from the BIOEAST countries are invited to submit their solutions to help close these innovation gaps.

BIOEAST HUBs, acting as challenge owners, will evaluate and select the most suitable solutions for their concrete context, and will provide opportunities for the selected innovators to pitch their solutions and to identify partnerships for their further professional development.

2. SCOPE OF THE CALL

The BIOEAST OIC is organised under 8 themes, each of them describing a problem statement, key issues to be addressed, and a non-exhaustive list of solutions the call is looking for. The BIOEAST OIC themes are:



Theme 1: Resilient small and medium-sized farms



Theme 2: Biomass logistics



Theme 3: Biowaste reduction and valorisation



Theme 4: Sustainable Bioenergy



Theme 5: Innovative wood technologies



Theme 6: Monitoring agri-food and forestry systems



Theme 7: Stakeholder engagement and collaboration



Theme 8: Raising awareness of the circular bioeconomy

3. PRIZES

Participation in BIOEAST pitching events

Successful applicants will be eligible to participate in pitching and matchmaking events held in 2026 in Hungary, Slovenia, Estonia, Bulgaria, and Czechia. These events will offer participants the opportunity to present and defend their business cases to both local and European investors potentially unlocking new funding and partnership opportunities, while also reaching a broader audience of bioeconomy stakeholders.

The winner of each theme will automatically be eligible to receive funding to cover their travel expenses for attending one of the pitching events. Financial support will only be provided if the winner chooses to take part in the event. Support to other participants will be subject to availability of resources.



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Prizes offered by the Bio-based Industries Consortium (BIC)

- The highest scoring non-commercial actor (e.g. university, research institute, etc.) will receive a one-year free Associate BIC Membership.
- The highest scoring company will be invited to a free pitching session, where they will have the opportunity to present their business and expertise to BIC members and explore opportunities for collaboration.
- Both of these winners and also the second highest scoring solution, will be invited to the next BIC Matchmaking Event in Brussels.

Theme-specific awards

BIOEAST HUBs and Thematic Working Groups will provide additional benefits to selected applicants. Details of these additional benefits are available on the respective theme pages.



4. APPLICATION

How to apply

- Applications must be submitted via an online form, available at: <https://bioeast.eu/open-innovation-challenge-application-form/>
- Participants are requested to carefully read the questions in the form.
- Only applications submitted via the application form will be accepted.
- Only the information included in the application form will be considered by evaluators.
- Withdrawal of an application shall be done in writing.

Multiple submissions

The same person or organisation can submit different proposals to the same or to different themes of this call. If the selection panel deems two proposals as very similar, only the latest submission will be taken into the account. If the latest submitted proposal is declared non-eligible, the other proposals submitted earlier will not be considered for evaluation.

Deadline

The deadline for submitting an application is 15 November 2025 at 23:59 CET. Any change or extension of the deadline will be announced in the official BIOEAST OIC webpage.

Only applications submitted before the deadline will be accepted. After the closure, no additions or changes to received applications will be taken into account.

Data protection

Data processing will be carried out based on the free and informed consent of applicants. The rights of applicants will be fully respected in accordance with ethical standards and the applicable EU and national data protection laws. Personal data will be collected only as necessary for the purposes of the BIOEAST OIC, will not be shared with external parties without explicit consent, and will be securely deleted after January 2027.

Intellectual property rights

The intellectual property rights to the solution submitted will stay exclusively with the applicant.

Absence of conflict of interest

A conflict of interest occurs when an applicant and an evaluator are from the same organisation or have any other form of association. Evaluators will need to declare any potential conflict of interests before doing the evaluation. If a conflict of interest is identified, external evaluators will be appointed to ensure a fair and impartial assessment.

Declarations

As part of the application form, applicants will be required to confirm the following declarations:

- I hereby declare that all the above information is correct and accurate.
- The applicant is over 18 years old and empowered to represent and commit to the team or the legal entity according to the relevant law.
- The solution proposed by the applicant is based on original work.
- I agree with data handling in compliance with the GDPR regulation. Data collected will be, securely stored, and used only for the purposes of the BIOEAST Open Innovation Challenge, data will not be shared externally without consent and will be deleted after January 2027.



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5. EVALUATION PROCESS

Eligibility assessment

Only eligible applications will proceed to evaluation. The first step in the assessment process is therefore an eligibility check, based on the following criteria:



Eligibility criteria	Description
Country	Applicants must be residents or nationals of BIOEAST countries only: Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia.
Language	Applications must be submitted in English.
Submission Deadline	Only applications submitted before the official deadline will be accepted. The deadline for applying is 15 November 2025 at 23:59 CET.
Duplicate submissions	If two applications from the same applicant are found to be very similar, only the most recent version will be evaluated.
Completeness	Only complete applications will be considered eligible.

Application evaluation and winner selection

Eligible applications will be evaluated against the following award criteria:

Award criteria	Description
Adequacy of submitted solution	Does the proposed solution match the theme? Does the proposed solution address the problem and key issues to be addressed?
Quality of the submission	Is the proposal clear, logical and well structured?
Novelty	Is the proposed solution innovative, significantly different and better than what is currently existing and available?
Impact	Impact of the solution according to the following parameters: economic, social and environmental.
Capacity of implementation	Capacity of the team and feasibility of implementing the solution.

The assessment will be carried out by a panel of experts from the BIOEAST HUBs and Thematic Working Groups involved in each theme.

Final selections will be primarily based on evaluation scores. However, to encourage broad participation and impact, evaluators may also consider geographic diversity criteria to ensure balanced representation among winners.

The applications with the highest score in each theme, will be awarded as a BIOEAST OIC winners.



6. INDICATIVE TIMELINE OF APPLICATION AND EVALUATION

BIOEAST OIC call open:
15 September – 15 November 2025

Evaluation process:
November 2025

Announcement of the winners:
20 December 2025

Participation in pitching events:
January – June 2026

7. POINTS OF CONTACT PROCESS

BIOEAST OIC info at:
<https://bioeast.eu/open-innovation-challenge/>

Application form:
<https://bioeast.eu/open-innovation-challenge-application-form/>

Questions regarding the application process may be sent to the following address:
bioeastoic@efi.int

