

CALL FOR INNOVATIONS

Acceleration services-
Decarbonisation of waterborne
transportation

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Background of SMARTDEC Project

“Smart Clusters for Maritime Decarbonisation”, known as [SMARTDEC](#), is an Interreg Atlantic Area project funded by the European Union. This project aims to create and develop a Network of Atlantic hubs of the maritime transport sector to provide tools, knowledge, and structure needed for an efficient implementation of decarbonisation solutions in maritime transportation.

This objective will be reached with a quadruple helix approach in which research & academia, policymakers, society, and the industry will collaborate to develop common strategies to achieve carbon neutrality in the sector.

SMARTDEC will be implemented through several activities. Firstly, comprehensive research on the waterborne transport sector and its decarbonisation in the Atlantic area, focusing on older initiatives, alongside detailed data and narrative analyses specific to each country, will be made. Such efforts are aimed to know the status of the sector in terms of pollution levels and decarbonisation, making identification of key stakeholders crucial for the Atlantic network.

Subsequently, research on innovation and development of emerging technologies will be conducted, leveraging insights collected from the initial activity's findings, stakeholder input, and research facilities. This research will be a summarised consolidation of workshop outcomes and will provide information about technologies that are under development.

The SMARTDEC network will be implemented and action plans for the stakeholders will be developed. This will pave the way towards setting up and accelerating promising innovations to decarbonise the maritime transport sector. All outputs and results will be available online via an interactive platform.

Objectives of the call for innovations

SMARTDEC's acceleration services aim at giving tailored coaching services to a person or a group of persons with an innovative business idea, marketable innovative solutions or projects to scaling up which will contribute to the decarbonisation of an EU sustainable and competitive waterborne transportation sector.

1. Description of SMARTDEC's acceleration services

In the context of waterborne transport decarbonisation, a high financial capacity and lengthened timeline are often required to implement full pilot actions demonstrating the performance of an innovative solution. As a result, in the SMARTDEC's framework, the acceleration services will not include the implementation of pilots themselves but will focus on the set up, preparation and acceleration of the best suited innovations/technologies to meet the Atlantic regions needs in terms of waterborne transport decarbonisation. At the final stages of SMARTDEC, these promising innovations will be ready for their full implementation afterwards (tech provider validated, end-user validated, financial support identified,). For this purpose, SMARTDEC acceleration services consist of:

- Matching innovative profiled solutions with European and regional needs
- Showcase the most promising technologies to decarbonize the waterborne transportation to the SMARTDEC network
- Support the innovative solutions developers on the definition of use cases and business models through interviews with end users
- Deploying business support to up-grade and prepare the selected promising innovations (i.e. business planning, financial planning)
- Detail the successful conditions necessary for the implementation of the pilot demonstrating the capabilities of the promising innovations
- Sharing best practices and recommendations for waterborne transport decarbonisation

The delivery mechanism of SMARTDEC's acceleration services is composed of:

- a) Groups sessions: the selected beneficiaries will be invited to participate in a couple of networking group sessions. It will be the occasion to:
 - Promote your elevator pitch in front of relevant stakeholders
 - Challenge your idea through expert's feedback
- b) Individual sessions:

Once the beneficiary is selected and accepted to be a participant in this programme, they will sign a Participation Agreement with the main rights and duties and a work plan adapted to their needs and timing which will be agreed between the beneficiary and the partner responsible of their coaching.

SMARTDEC acceleration services will adapt to the technological readiness level (TRL) of each project in order to maximize the leveraging effect of the support provided. For early-stage projects having a low TRL, an emphasis on the proof of concept will be made while higher TRL projects will be articulated around the preparation of large-scale pilot demonstrators.

The following list contains the type of activities part of this service to be provided for each beneficiary by the partners. Notwithstanding, the beneficiary and the partner can agree to make a more customized service adapted to their case and to the concrete funding or financial intermediary to be addressed:

1. An analysis and preliminary assessment of the innovation project searching for finance/advisory services to ensure a minimum return for valuable information for the potential end-user/ investors including:
 - The evaluation of the economic and financial viability
 - The degree of innovation and readiness level
 - The commercial strategy
 - The degree of maturity of the project
2. Personal interviews with the promoters for the evaluation of their business profile and spirit, including the assessment of their professional and business experience, as well as their personal profile.
3. Training and preparation of the promoters' management team, through a specific training plan to improve their business management skills
4. Supporting and providing advice during the steps necessary to access to funding and to the SMARTDEC network dedicated to waterborne transportation

Due to the services provided by SMARTDEC, a declaration on the grants received de minimis might be required to be fulfilled by the beneficiary once has been selected.

2. Evaluation procedure

1. Eligibility criteria

The beneficiary of the service can be a natural person, such as potential entrepreneurs, or a legal entity. In the case of a legal entity, the company should comply with the definition of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs¹).

The project to be submitted to the SMARTDEC call for innovations must be located in any of the regions of the Atlantic Area Cooperation Programme (see the map below)²



¹ https://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/sme-definition_en

² <https://www.atlanticarea.eu/about-us/interreg-atlantic-area-2021-2027>

2. Methodology to select the beneficiaries

The proposals are evaluated based on the completed application form submitted to SMARTDEC. After the initial verification of the eligibility criteria, the proposals received will be evaluated based on four award criteria:

- **Innovation** (30%): focused on the technical part of the idea, product or solution. The country coordinator will evaluate the degree of innovation, the technical achievability and the risks associated to the technology in order to also estimate the feasibility.
- **Impact** (30%): this criterion covers the expected and broader impact that the idea, product or solution will have on the market, environment and society.
- **Implementation** (30%): focused on the commercial feasibility. The team (actual or potential), the plan towards commercialization and associated risks will be evaluated.
- **Other Consideration** (10%): there are two other relevant aspects to be evaluated in line with the principles of the SMARTDEC project: the transnational dimension of the proposals and the women's contribution to the SME and the Blue Economy sectors.

Ultimately, [at least] 8 beneficiaries will be selected including [at least] 2 per country (France, Ireland, Portugal, Spain) according to their final score ranking. Each beneficiary will be supported by its corresponding regional/national SMARTDEC partners and will be provided with a tailored assistance packages based on the services described in the above section 1.

3. How to apply

Fill out this application form by 28 March 2025 : [HERE](#)

4. Estimated calendar

28th February 2025 – Opening date of the call

28st March 2025 – Deadline date for submitting proposals

15th May 2025 – Communication of selected beneficiaries

10th June 2025 – Estimated date for the joint kick-off event

26th June 2026 – Conclusion of the acceleration services