



bluedots



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Call for expressions of interest: Coaching and mentoring services for SMEs in the social economy on the digitalization of the blue economy

("Call for expressions of interest – Coaching and mentoring services")

Bluedots-WP4-2024-001

Project number: 101167884

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1. PURPOSE OF THE CALL

This [call for expressions of interest](#) is published as part of [the Bluedots project](#) to select 40 social economy SMEs (beneficiaries) for the [provision of coaching and mentoring services](#) aimed at improving their digital sustainability.

Through this call, the Bluedots project will select 40 participants from social economy SMEs in the blue sector to receive tailor-made coaching and mentoring services. This support is intended to help beneficiaries assess their needs, strengthen their capacities, and define practical action plans for the uptake of digital and sustainable practices in their activities. The service will be provided in the form of on-site or online consultations, enabling SMEs to access expert guidance on improving their operations, organisational processes, and environmental performance.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE PROJECT Bluedots

Bluedots - Blue Economy Digital Opportunities for Social Economy Transition, is a project funded by the European Innovation Council and the Executive Agency for SMEs.

The Bluedots project aims to strengthen the capacities of social economy SMEs in the blue economy through training, access to tailored services, and financial support for digital practices and reducing their environmental footprint, namely

- Supporting the transition to digital and environmentally friendly practices and production processes;
- Promoting the adoption of digital technologies and innovations;
- Building the capacity and competitiveness of social economy SMEs through knowledge transfer and skills development in sustainable practices;
- Promoting transnational cooperation, the exchange of best practices, and the promotion of sustainable practices through awareness-raising activities.

The Bluedots project implements a capacity-building program (1) for small and medium-sized enterprises in the social economy, focusing on business needs, innovation, and specific blue economy value chains and operational processes, a mentoring and coaching program (2), an advisory support program (3) to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and expertise from experts and practitioners, and a financial facility program (4) that provides grants. This call for expressions of interest is published as part of the Bluedots mentoring and coaching program.

Further information about the Bluedots project can be found on the project website: <https://diesis-network.coop/bluedots/project/>

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE CALL

The main objective of this call for expressions of interest is to identify 40 social economy SMEs in the blue economy that will receive coaching and mentoring services to improve their ability to transition to a more digital business model by improving efficiency.

Topics that may be covered in the coaching and mentoring services include:

Blue economy strategy in the European context

- Applying Blue Economy principles to marine sectors: fisheries, aquaculture, offshore energy, ports, maritime tourism)
- New values through marine by-products (biomass, algae, by-products, waste heat, data)

- Connection to EU policy: Green Deal, Circular Economy Action Plan, Biodiversity Strategy 2030, derivation for individual corporate strategies

Blue Innovation & Circular marine value chains

- Cascade use of marine resources and industrial symbiosis
- Circular production models in coastal and maritime regions
- Regenerative approaches for strengthening marine ecosystems

Digitalization for a Sustainable Blue Economy

- IoT and AI for marine monitoring, efficiency and resource optimization
- Building blue skills and transformation capacity within blue economy organisations
- Data-driven transparency and compliance (e.g. CSRD)

Change leadership for sustainable transformation in the blue economy

- Dealing with resistance and uncertainty.
- Promoting a corporate culture that allows for mistakes, encourages innovation, and thinks in terms of cycles.
- Coaching on communication strategies for internal and external stakeholders

Additional thematic areas

The coaching and mentoring services may also address sector-specific needs related to efficiency, sustainability, digital uptake, and organisational improvement in the blue economy, including:

- Fishery & food production
- Responsible/Blue tourism & educational initiatives
- Renewable energy & marine litter management
- Sustainable blue biotech & production
- Community water management
- Digitalization processes and sovereignty
- Supply chain transparency
- Zero-emission shipping

The call will be open from March 30, 2026, to October 31, 2026. The list of selected beneficiaries will be published on September 05, 2026, on the Bluedots website.

With this call for expressions of interest, the Bluedots consortium invites social economy SMEs in the blue economy to apply for tailored coaching and mentoring services. The services will be provided free of

charge to the successful beneficiaries. The services can be provided in English or in one of the following languages: German, Spanish, Italian, or Polish. In-person coaching, travel costs are not covered.

Please note that applying for this call does not automatically imply the right or guarantee to be selected.

4. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

To be eligible as a beneficiary, the applicant must meet the following requirements:

- The organisation must be registered in the European Union.
- The organisation must qualify as a social economy SME and as an SME within the meaning of the official EU SME definition.
- The organisation must carry out their productive activities in the blue economy.

DEFINITIONS

Definition of Social Economy SMEs for the purposes of the Bluedots call

For the purposes of this call, applicants must qualify both as SMEs and as entities of the social economy operating in the blue economy.

For the definition of SMEs, please refer to the official EU SME definition: https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/smes/sme-definition_en

The social economy covers entities that place people and a social and/or environmental purpose before profit, reinvest most of their surpluses in the collective or general interest, and apply democratic and/or participatory governance.

Traditionally, this includes cooperatives, mutual benefit societies, associations, foundations, and social enterprises, depending on the national legal framework.

In the context of Bluedots, eligible applicants are social economy SMEs carrying out productive activities in the blue economy, including for example fisheries, aquaculture, coastal and maritime tourism, marine

renewable energy, blue biotechnology, maritime services, water-related community services, circular blue value chains, and other marine or coastal activities.

These enterprises may adopt digital tools and services to improve sustainability, efficiency, traceability, resource use, organisational performance, or access to markets, while remaining anchored in the principles of the social economy.

The core eligibility criterion is therefore not a generic reference to blue and digital enterprises, but the applicant's nature as a social economy SME active in the blue economy.

Applications that are in one of the following situations are excluded:

- a) They are in bankruptcy proceedings, liquidation, judicial settlement proceedings, have ceased trading, are the subject of proceedings to that effect, or are in a similar situation arising from similar proceedings under national laws and regulations;
- b) They or persons with powers of representation, decision-making or control have been convicted of an offense by a final judgment of a competent court of a Member State that calls into question their professional reliability;
- c) they have committed a serious professional misconduct that has been proven by the contracting party, including through decisions of the European Investment Bank and international organizations;
- d) They have failed to comply with your obligations to pay social security contributions or taxes in accordance with the laws of the country in which you are established, or in accordance with the laws of the country of the contracting party or the country in which the contract is to be performed;
- e) they or persons with powers of representation, decision-making or control have been convicted by a final judgment for fraud, corruption, involvement in a criminal organization, money laundering or any other illegal activity affecting the financial interests of the Union;
- f) an administrative penalty has been imposed on them for having made false declarations or failed to provide the information required by the contracting authority as a condition for participation in a procurement procedure, or for having seriously breached their obligations under a contract covered by the budget;
- g) they are in a conflict of interest in relation to a potential contract; a conflict of interest could arise in particular on the basis of economic interests, political or national affiliation, family or emotional ties, or other relevant connections or shared interests.

5. APPLICATION PROCEDURE

SMEs in the social economy in the blue economy wishing to apply for this call for expressions of interest are requested to submit their application via [this link](#) and fill in all the required fields. Applications must be written in English (applications written partly in another language are not eligible and will be automatically excluded and marked as ineligible).

<https://forms.gle/5W2SpueiGWNtyHhu6>

All information provided must be complete and valid. After submission, all applicants will receive a confirmation email with the registered date and time of submission.

6. DEADLINE AND EVALUATION

This call for expressions of interest is open until October 31, 2026

Submitted applications will be evaluated by a selection committee coordinated by [innova eG](#), the partner coordinating this task within the Bluedots consortium. The evaluation will be conducted in accordance with appropriate ethical principles and without conflicts of interest, while maintaining the confidentiality of the information received. All evaluators must sign a non-disclosure agreement (NDA) with innova eG to ensure the confidentiality of the information received.

The evaluation will be carried out on two levels, namely

- **eligibility check to determine whether the conditions set out in the call for proposals are met:**

Eligibility requirements

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 | The application is complete, legible, and written entirely in English. |
| 2 | The application has been submitted by the deadline (expected to be October 31, 2026, 5 p.m Brussels time). |
| 3 | The application has been submitted by a social economy SME active in the blue economy. |

- **The technical evaluation, which is based on the following criteria:**

Technical requirements

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 | Relevance: 40 points <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Compliance with the objectives and priorities of digitization specified in the call for proposals.- Assessment of the direct impact of the requested service on SMEs in the social economy. |
| 2 | Innovation: 25 points <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Assessment of the degree of creativity and innovation of the SME in relation to the requested coaching and mentoring service. |
| 3 | Impact: 35 points <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Assessment of the potential impact, feasibility, and sustainability of the desired service, taking into account the availability of resources and logistical aspects. |

The list of selected beneficiaries will be published on the Bluedots website by September 05, 2026. Each beneficiary will be notified by email.

7. SIGNING OF THE AGREEMENT

Once an applicant from the social economy has been selected for coaching and/or mentoring, a specific agreement will be signed within 14 days of notification between the selected SME from the social economy and the national Bluedots partner providing the [coaching or mentoring service](#). The agreement contains information about the desired service, including the type of service and the schedule for providing/receiving the service.

By signing, the social economy beneficiary accepts the [coaching and/or mentoring service](#), and the national Bluedots partner undertakes to provide the [coaching and/or mentoring service](#) and to report to the Bluedots consortium on the activities carried out. The service must be completed within a maximum of 6 months from the start date. The services may be provided by experts within the consortium and/or by external experts, including the [Euro Coop](#) network.

National partners:

- Diesis Network ([DIESIS](#)), based at Boulevard Charlemagne 74, Brussels 1000, Belgium,
- Legacoop ([Legacoop](#)), based at Via Guattani 9 00161 Rome, Italy,
- COCETA ([COCETA](#)), based at C/ Virgen de los Peligros, 3, Planta 4, 28013 Madrid, Spain,
- Baltic Sea & Space Cluster ([BSSC](#)), based at Polska 13A Str., 81-339 Gdynia, Poland,
- Irish Social Enterprise Network ([SOCENT](#)), based in Nordubco, Bea orpen building, DCU Glasnevin Campus, Dublin, Ireland
- innova eG ([innova eG](#)), based at Huckarder Str. 10, 44147 Dortmund, Germany,

8. COMPLAINTS

If you have any complaints about the results of this call for proposals, please contact the Bluedots consortium within 3 days of the announcement of the results at the following email address: bluedotsproject@diesis.coop and provide the following information:

- Name of the applicant and contact details;
- The subject of your complaint;
- Information and evidence of the alleged violation.

The Bluedots coordinator will review the complaint based on the information provided by the applicant, assess the case, and decide whether the complaint is justified or not, and inform the applicant of the decision made.

If the complaint is deemed justified, the selection committee will re-evaluate the project application and the related evaluation section, provided that the complainant submits an updated evaluation.

The final decision on the complaint will be communicated to the applicant in writing within 20 working days of the date of submission of the complaint. This decision is final and binding on all parties. It is not subject to further appeal under the program if the complaint is based on the same grounds.

9. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND CONDITIONS

A. DATA MANAGEMENT

Personal data and information provided in the application form are used directly for the purpose of enabling a complete and successful evaluation of applicants and providing specific **coaching and mentoring services** for SMEs in the social economy. This includes:

- Name and contact details of the applicant (telephone number, postal address, address, website)
- Name and contact details of the contact person (email, telephone number)
- Company VAT identification number

In the event of a successful application for services, the following additional information about all beneficiaries is required:

- Details of the grant recipient's representative (first and last name, position, phone number, phone number, email address, signature).

The persons whose personal data is processed have the right to access and correct their own personal data. To do so, they must send requests regarding the processing of their personal data to the following email address: bluedotsproject@diesis.coop. The data will be processed in accordance with applicable EU and national data protection laws.

The General Data Protection Regulation (2016/679/EU) guarantees that the data will be processed in a manner that respects the fundamental rights and freedoms and dignity of the data subject, in particular with regard to confidentiality, personal identity, and the right to data protection. By applying, the applicant consents to the storage and use of their personal data for the implementation of Bluedots' objectives and work plan. Submission of an application for the Bluedots call for proposals implies full and unconditional acceptance of these provisions.

B. VISIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

When disseminating and using results achieved through the coaching and mentoring services of the Bluedots consortium, beneficiary social economy SMEs must acknowledge the Bluedots project by properly crediting and displaying the EU emblem and the Bluedots logo, as well as the EU disclaimer.

If you have any questions about the Bluedots project in general, please contact us at bluedotsproject@diesis.coop. If you have specific questions about this call, please contact innova eG at bluedots@innova-eg.de.



March 30, 2026