

Call for Expression of Interest to become Regional Innovation Valley

Frequently Asked Questions

0. Which are the main attributes of a regional innovation valley?

In line with the [New European Innovation Agenda](#), regions that aspire to become regional innovation valleys must meet the following three (3) main conditions:

- i. Enhance the coordination and directionality of the region's R&I investment and policies, at regional level in support of key EU priorities and to address the most burning challenges facing the EU¹;
- ii. Engage, building on shared or complementary smart specialisation areas (where applicable), in interregional collaboration to develop innovation, including deep tech innovation, and help increase innovation cohesion by addressing Europe's persistent innovation divide between regions at different levels of development and/or innovation performance by including regions with lower innovation performance;
- iii. Strengthen and connect their regional innovation ecosystems, including for example through joint innovation action plans to constitute connected regional innovation valleys building on their Smart Specialisation Strategies (containing milestones and targets) and, where applicable, on the participation in the Partnerships for Regional Innovation (PRIs).

Regions that seek to become regional innovation valleys have to comply with all these conditions. A region for example which does not intend to “enhance the coordination and directionality of the region's R&I investment and policies” towards at least one of the challenges mentioned in the NEIA and call for expression of interest, **cannot** become a regional innovation valley even if it fulfills the other conditions.

1. How can a region become a regional innovation valley?

There are **two ways** for a region to seek the label of “regional innovation valley”:

- The region could participate in the **dedicated call for proposals** either in **the European Innovation Ecosystems Work Programme** under Horizon Europe or **the Interregional Innovation Investments (I3) Instrument** under the European Regional Development Fund. **The first calls open on 17 May 2023 and close on 17 October 2023**, with more calls envisaged in 2024 and 2025.
 - Upon being selected for funding, all the regions represented in a project will be considered regional innovation valleys (for the I3 Instrument, where requested by the relevant regional authority e.g., the managing authority of an ERDF programme or the authority in charge of the regional Smart Specialisation Strategy).
- The region could **participate in the [call for expression of interest](#) and indicate how it commits to the conditions for becoming a regional innovation valley**. The call for expression of interest was launched on 28 March and will remain **available until 18 September**.
 - The expression of interests will be reviewed by independent experts. Where necessary, the region will be contacted to complete or clarify the information provided. Upon a positive assessment by external evaluators, the region will be considered a regional innovation valley, even if it has not participated or succeeded in one of the dedicated calls for proposals mentioned above.

¹ Reducing the reliance on fossil fuels, increasing global food security, mastering the digital transformation (including cybersecurity), improving healthcare and achieving circularity.

2. Why did the Commission launch a call for expression of interest to become regional innovation valley?

The call for expression of interest launched **on 28 March 2023** by Commissioners Gabriel and Ferreira together with the Committee of Regions, aims to raise awareness and mobilise all regions in Europe to work together in key innovation domains and become **regional innovation valleys**. The call for expression of interest will remain open **until 18 September 2023** and the Commission will regularly publish its progress with a view to stimulating discussions among interested regions.

The call for expression of interest will:

- Enable regions to express their interest to **become regional innovation valleys** and work together, building on but not limited to their smart specialisation strategies, contributing to the Union's strategic priorities.
 - o Regions are invited to indicate **in which innovation domain** (food security, renewable energy, circular economy, digital transition, healthcare system, other) they would like to strengthen their R&I investments and policies and engage in interregional cooperation.
 - o The results will be regularly updated on the [New European Innovation Agenda](#) page.

Help interested regions to **identify relevant partners**, by facilitating matchmaking and interconnections among those regions who converge towards the same thematic/technological objectives, in particular within the framework of the Commission's Smart Specialisation Community of Practice and other dedicated activities, including activities stemming from the PRI pilot action initiative.

3. What is the purpose of the questions asked in the EU Survey attached to the call for expression of interest?

The questions that regions are invited to respond to in the EU Survey as part of the call for expression of interest, aim to evaluate whether a region is on track to complying to the conditions for becoming a regional innovation valley, including through its commitments, and to identify which challenges it intends to address through interregional innovation cooperation.

4. How will the applications under the call for expression of interest be assessed?

Applicants will be able to participate in the call for expression of interest from the 28th March to 18th September. The closing of the call for expression of interest, the call under the European Innovation Ecosystems Work Programme of Horizon Europe and the call of the Interregional Innovation Investments (I3) Instrument under the European Regional Development Fund, signify the beginning of the "**evaluation period**" which is expected to last until March 2024.

During this period, there will be an evaluation of the European Innovation Ecosystems and the Interregional Innovation Investments (I3) Instrument calls proposals according to the procedures specified in the legal basis of each programme. In parallel, evaluation of **those regions which expressed their interest** to become a regional innovation valley **committing to all the essential conditions** will proceed. These regions will be invited to **provide evidence on their commitments** put forward in the call for expression of interest and complement with additional information requested by the Commission. The final decision on if they will be named regional innovation valleys to be taken also by March 2024.

5. What kind of regions are eligible to apply?

Typically, eligible regions are those defined at NUTS 1 and NUTS 2 level. The appropriate NUTS level has to be decided case by case in view of the governance level at which regional innovation policies are designed and implemented. This can correspond to e.g. ERDF programme area, geographic coverage of the regional Smart Specialisation strategy, administrative boundaries and/or the structure of the regional innovation ecosystem.

If e.g. NUTS 3 regions, cities, cross border regions etc. are willing to submit an expression of interest, they should justify their choice of geographic coverage and describe how its functioning mechanism comply with the explained rationale. Sub-regional applications from for example cities should be submitted with an endorsement of the relevant regional authority.

6. Should regions apply individually or as a consortium of regional organisations?

As a region, you should apply in this call for expression of interest on an individual basis. However, if you already cooperate with any other regions under a specific thematic/technological area, you are invited to indicate with which one in your application. In particular, you will find the option after answering to the following point:

“Are you committed to engaging in interregional collaboration to develop innovation, including deep tech innovation, and help increase innovation cohesion addressing Europe’s persistent innovation divide between regions at different levels of development and/or innovation performance? Do you commit to implement interregional innovation activities with other regions, on the basis of similar specialisation and complementary capabilities?”

7. Are regional innovation valleys restricted to regions of the EU?

While the call for expression of interest is addressed and focused on the regions of the EU, we welcome also the participation of regions from countries associated with Horizon or the I3 Instrument² as they are also eligible to participate in the European Innovation Ecosystems Work Programme and I3 Instrument’s calls for proposals.

8. Do applicants of this call for expression of interest receive any financial support?

No. To receive financial support, regions must successfully apply to the upcoming European Innovation Ecosystems Work Programme or Interregional Innovation Investments (I3) Instrument calls.

9. Am I eligible as a company/university/innovation ecosystem actor to submit an expression of interest?

The call for expression of interest is open only to regional authorities.

Companies, universities, innovation hubs, technological park, etc. are encouraged to signal their interest to the relevant regional authorities.

² [list-3rd-country-participation_i3_en.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)