DIGITAL, INNOVATION, AND GREEN TECHNOLOGY PROJECT (DIGIT PROJECT)

DIGIT
DIGITAL, INNOVATION, AND GREEN TECHNOLOGY PROJECT

REPUBLIKA HRVATSKA
Ministry of Science, Education and Youth

THE WORLD BANK
IBRD • IDA | WORLD BANK GROUP

REPUBLIC OF CROATIA
MINISTRY OF SCIENCE, EDUCATION AND YOUTH
Donje Svetice 38, Zagreb 10 000, Croatia

DIGITAL, INNOVATION, AND GREEN TECHNOLOGY PROJECT (DIGIT PROJECT)

IBRD LOAN NO. 9558-HR

PROJECT ID: P180755

GUIDELINES FOR APPLICANTS

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

"PROFESSIONALIZATION OF RESEARCH CENTERS"

CALL REFERENCE NUMBER: DIGIT.1.2.03

August 2025

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

BDP	Business Development Plan for Research Center
DIGIT	Digital, Innovation, and Green Technology Project
EC	Evaluation Committee
ESCOP	Environmental and Social Code of Practice
ESMF	Environmental and Social Management Framework
ESMP	Environmental and Social Management Plan
ESSQ	Environmental and Social Screening Questionnaire
EU	European Union
EUR	euro (currency)
FAIR	findable, accessible, interoperable, reusable principles
FAQ	frequently asked questions
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GOM	Grants Operations Manual
GRM	Grievance Redress Mechanism
HEI	higher education institution
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
IFC	International Finance Corporation
IP	intellectual property
MSEY	Ministry of Science, Education and Youth
OG	Official Gazette
PAD	Project Appraisal Document
PRI	public research institute
R&D	research and development
R&I	research and innovation
RI	research infrastructure
RC	research center
RRF	Recovery and Resilience Facility
ToC	Theory of Change
VAT	value added tax
WB	World Bank

Definitions

In this document, the following terms and expressions should be interpreted as defined below:

- «Applicant» is a public entity that intends to submit or has submitted a project proposal to the funding call (in this case, the Professionalization of Research Centers call for proposals) under a grant scheme.
- «Application» is a detailed project proposal submitted under this Call with comprehensive descriptions of objectives, timelines, resources, budget, and compliance with environmental, social, and ethical standards. It is aimed at demonstrating the project's excellence, potential, feasibility, and eligibility for funding.
- «Baseline survey» is a questionnaire conducted at the beginning of the application process to collect important baseline information about the applicant, the project proposal and feedback on the Call. This data helps assess the current capabilities of applicants, sets a reference point for future evaluations, and provides insights for the impact assessment of the Call.
- «Beneficiary» is the signatory of the Grant Agreement, who receives the funding, claims costs, and assumes complete responsibility for the proper implementation of the proposed project.
- «Calendar year» refers to a one-year period that begins on January 1 and ends on December 31.
- «Call for proposals» or «Call» is an invitation for project funding issued by the Ministry of Science, Education and Youth (MSEY) and represents a funding opportunity available through DIGIT Project. Direct financial contribution in the form of a grant is awarded to beneficiaries through the Call to engage in activities that support the objectives of the DIGIT Project and policies related to digital transformation and green transition.
- «Double funding» means eligible expenditures have not been previously financed by grants from any public source (including from the EU) nor will they be financed more than once besides this Call.
- «Grant» refers to funding provided or proposed to be provided under the terms of a Grant Agreement, in accordance with the criteria and procedures outlined in the Grants Operations Manual (GOM) and Call for proposals issued by MSEY, to an eligible beneficiary for financing a project. This grant is financed out of the proceeds of the Loan.
- «Grant Agreement» means an agreement to be entered into between the MSEY and a beneficiary for the financing and implementation of a project.
- «Grant scheme» means, collectively, the scheme or programs for extending grants to beneficiaries under sub-components 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, and 2.2 of the DIGIT Project in accordance with the GOM.
- «Program» refers to the Professionalization of Research Centers program under the DIGIT Project. This Call for proposals (DIGIT.1.2.0) is published under this Program.
- «Project» means a project carried out by a beneficiary using a grant under one of the Grant schemes (in this case Professionalization of Research Centers).
- «Research center» in terms of applicant eligibility conditions of this Call, represents a part or the entirety of the research infrastructure, including all resources, expertise, and facilities necessary to support scientific research and foster innovation.
- «Research infrastructure» means facilities, resources and related services used by the scientific community to conduct research in their respective fields. It includes scientific equipment or sets of instrument, knowledge-based resources such as collections, archives or structured scientific information, enabling information and communication technology-based infrastructures such as grid, computing, software and communication, or any other entity of a unique nature essential to conduct research. Such infrastructures may be “single-sited” or “distributed” (i.e. organized networks of resources).

1. Context of the Call

The Call for proposals Professionalization of Research Centers (hereafter: the Call) is financed by the Digital, Innovation, and Green Technology (DIGIT) Project, a EUR 106 million initiative designed to strengthen research and innovation capacity, increase funding for applied research and experimental development, and support the Croatian government in delivering effective research and innovation policies. The call also supports digital transformation and the green transition. Funded through a World Bank loan signed in June 2023, the DIGIT Project is scheduled for completion by December 2028.

Research infrastructures (RIs) play a key role in enabling and advancing research in all scientific domains and represent a significant share of research investment. Most RIs are funded, managed, and operated at a national level and provide services primarily to the national research community. Croatia's research infrastructure holds significant innovation potential but faces challenges such as management responsibilities falling on research teams, lack of business orientation, and limited collaboration with the private sector. Professional management with clear structures and a business-oriented approach is essential to enhance efficiency, attract talent, and strengthen partnerships.

This Call seeks to optimize the operation and use of research infrastructures in Croatia. Through improved infrastructure management and increased collaboration with the private sector, research centers (RC) will improve research performance and increase the return on investment. The implementation of this Call is crucial for advancing research, innovation, and public-private collaboration, thereby contributing to Croatia's research and innovation excellence and overall socio-economic growth.

Applicants are advised to read the Call documentation carefully. These documents provide clarifications and answers to questions on preparing project proposals.

2. Legal framework and governance

A grant within this Call will be awarded to the beneficiary in accordance with the conditions set forth in the following documents:

- Project Appraisal Document (PAD) - Digital, Innovation, and Green Technology Project - P180755[1];
- Law on the confirmation of the Loan agreement between the Republic of Croatia and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development for the Digital, Innovation, and Green Technology Project (Official Gazette (OG) 9/23)[2];
- Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF)[3];
- Grants Operations Manual (GOM) and its amendments[4];
- Grant Agreement[5].

[1] Project Appraisal Document (PAD), link
[2] Law on the confirmation of the Loan agreement between the Republic of Croatia and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development for the "Digital, Innovation, and Green Technology" project (OG 9/23), link
[3] Environmental and Social Management Framework, link
[4] Grants Operations Manual (GOM) and its amendments, link
[5] Annex A. Template of a Grant Agreement is part of Annex I. Conditions for the preparation and implementation of projects within the DIGIT Project (Section 4.1.) of this Call for proposals

The following national legislation is relevant in the context of this Call:

- Law on Higher Education and Scientific Activity (OG 119/22);
- Criminal Code (OG 125/11, 144/12, 56/15, 61/15, 101/17, 118/18, 126/19, 84/21, 114/22, 114/23, 36/24);
- Criminal code (OG 110/97, 27/98, 50/00, 129/00, 51/01, 111/03, 190/03, 105/04, 84/05, 71/06, 110/07, 152/08, 57/11, 77/11, 143/12);
- Law on Prevention of Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing (OG 108/17, 39/19, 151/22)
- Law on Public Procurement (OG 120/16, 114/22);
- Law on the Implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation (OG 42/18).

In addition to the previously established regulations, all delegated and implementing acts adopted on their basis also apply. The regulations applicable to this Call are those in force at the time of its publication. This means that the Guidelines for Applicants and annexes, and any relationships arising from the Call are subject to current legislation, including any laws and regulations that come into force at a later date, as well as any future amendments. It is the responsibility of the applicant to verify the applicable laws at the time of submitting their project proposal, as the regulations in force at the time of submission will apply to the applicant.

The Ministry of Science, Education and Youth (hereafter: MSEY) oversees the entire DIGIT Project, manages each program, and is responsible for of the execution of this Call. This includes conducting the selection process of project proposals, preparing and signing Grant Agreements (and addendums, if applicable), as well as monitoring and the implementation of projects.

3. Objectives and focus of the Call

The objective of the Call is to *enhance research infrastructure management and foster collaboration with the private sector to unlock the full potential of existing resources and drive innovation*.

At the level of the Call objective, progress will be monitored by the following long-term effects indicators:

- *Number of IP applications filed*,
- *Number of technology transfer realized*.

The expected results of the Call are improved infrastructure utilization and collaboration, and strengthened research performance.

Improved infrastructure utilization and collaboration entails the following:

- Increased efficiency: Professional management practices will lead to a more efficient use of existing research infrastructure, maximizing the return on investment. This may involve optimized facility oversight, improved resource allocation and streamlined processes.
- Enhanced collaboration: By facilitating networking among researchers, entrepreneurs, and investors, the Call aims to stimulate collaborative research projects. This can lead to a more vibrant innovation ecosystem with increased knowledge transfer and cross-sector partnerships.
- Greater private sector engagement: A more business-oriented approach within public research organizations will make them more attractive to the private sector. This can result in increased

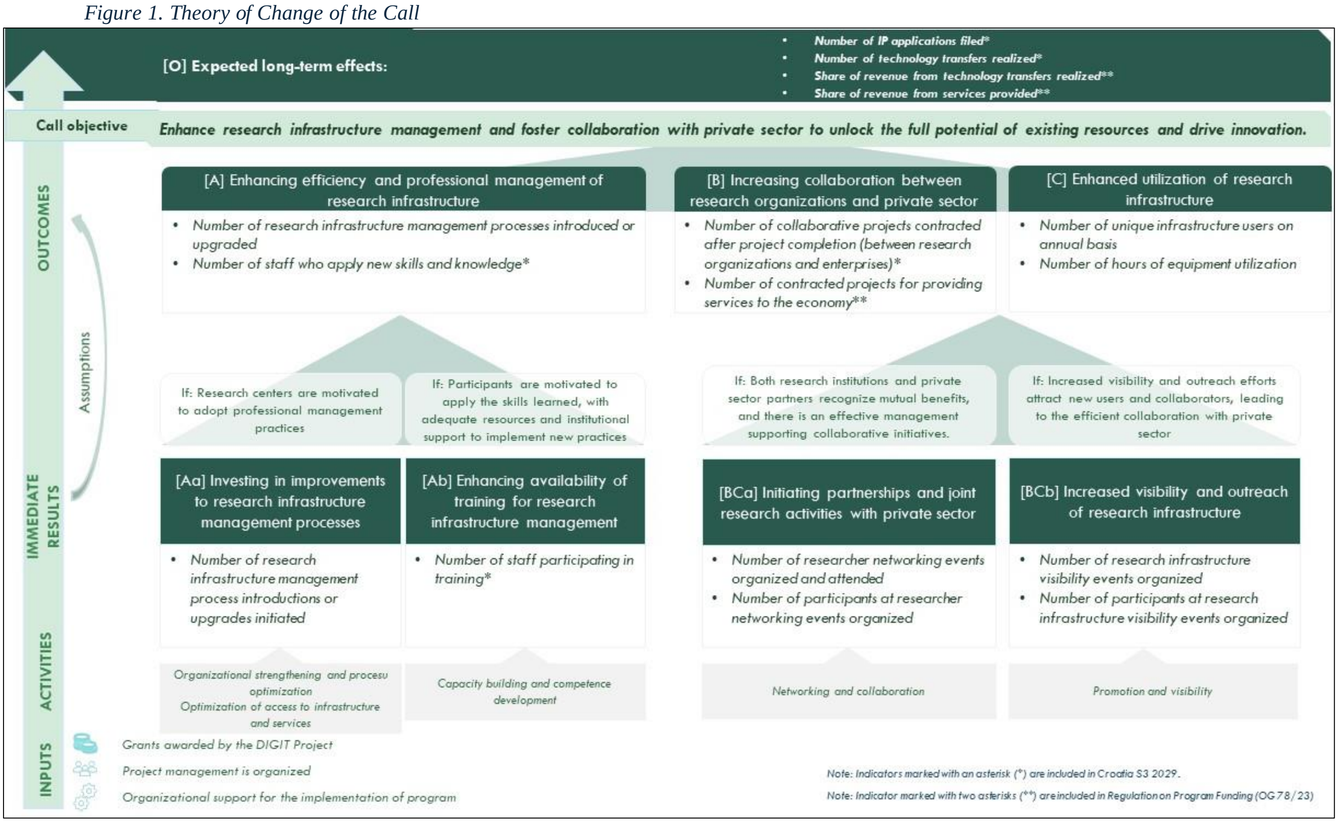
private sector participation in research projects, co-funding opportunities, and joint ventures.

Strengthened research performance entails the following:

- Improved research outcomes: By enabling research centers to leverage their infrastructure more effectively and collaborate more productively, the Call is expected to directly contribute to enhanced research outcomes. This could involve a higher volume of research publications, ground-breaking discoveries, and the development of innovative solutions.
- Enhanced research capabilities: Professional management practices can help public research organizations establish stronger research management structures. This can result in improved research planning, resource allocation for high-impact projects, and the ability to attract and retain top talent.
- Increased innovation: The overall aim is to foster an environment that cultivates innovation. This can lead to the development of new technologies, products, and services that drive economic growth and societal progress.

The main objective and expected outcomes are integrated into the Theory of Change (ToC), which serves as the logical framework for the Call, as illustrated in Figure 1 below. The ToC outlines the expected immediate results, activities, and inputs required to achieve long-term effects. All project proposals must align with this ToC framework.

Figure 1. Theory of Change of the Call



For the purpose of monitoring the results of the Call, Table 1 outlines the results framework with indicators based on the Theory of Change. Applicants are required to select or specify target values for the indicators within the application form. Data on outcome and impact indicators will be collected up to five years after project completion via post-implementation reports or surveys. By applying to the Call, the applicants consent to being contacted by MSEY after project completion.

Table 1. Effectiveness indicators (describing the Call results according to the Theory of Change)

<table>
<tr><th colspan="6">Objective of the Call: To enhance research infrastructure management and foster collaboration along with private sector to unlock the full potential of existing resources and drive innovation</th></tr>
<tr><th>Indicator label</th><th>Level</th><th>Indicator</th><th>Measurement unit</th><th>Deadline for completion</th><th>Note regarding the selection of indicators</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">O1</td><td>Impact</td><td>Number of intellectual property applications filed</td><td>Application</td><td>Five years after project completion</td><td rowspan="2">Applicants are required to select the indicator and set a target value for it at the project level. Indicator selection is mandatory.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Description: The indicator refers to the number of applications for intellectual property, including patents, trademarks, industrial designs, etc., filed by the beneficiary, which are the result of activities carried out within the funded project.
Source of verification: report and/or survey during the post-implementation period, document or link to a public source verifying the application status.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">O2</td><td>Impact</td><td>Number of technology transfers realized</td><td>Technology transfer</td><td>Five years after project completion</td><td rowspan="2">Applicants are required to select the indicator and set a target value for it at the project level. Indicator selection is mandatory.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Description: The indicator refers to the transfer of research results (knowledge and technology) achieved through the implementation of the project for the purpose of their further development and/or use in the development and commercialization of new products (goods or services) or processes. The results of the project can be transferred from the project beneficiary to other subjects through signed research and development contracts or intellectual property licensing contracts, or by establishing new enterprises.
Source of verification: report and/or survey during the post-implementation period, or documentation verifying the status.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">O3</td><td>Impact</td><td>Share of revenue from technology transfers on annual basis</td><td>EUR</td><td>Five years after project completion</td><td rowspan="2">Applicants are required to select the indicator and set a target value for it at the project level. Indicator selection is mandatory.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Description: This indicator measures the share of revenue generated through the commercialization of knowledge, procedures, processes, prototypes, and intellectual property rights, as a proportion of the total annual funding of a public higher education institution or a public research institute.
Source of verification: Annual financial reports, report and/or survey in the post-implementation period</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">O4</td><td>Impact</td><td>Share of revenue from services provided on annual basis</td><td>EUR</td><td>Five years after project completion</td><td rowspan="2">Applicants are required to select the indicator and set a target value for it at the project level. Indicator selection is mandatory.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Description: This indicator measures the share of revenue earned by a public higher education institution or a public research institute through the provision of services to businesses and other entities, as a proportion of the institution’s total annual funding. The indicator refers to commercial projects, which may include contract research, development of analyses and studies, measurement and testing services, and similar services provided to companies and other entities under market conditions.
Source of verification: Annual financial reports, report and/or survey in the post-implementation period</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><th colspan="6">[A] Specific objective: Enhancing efficiency and professional management of research infrastructure</th></tr>
<tr><th>Indicator label</th><th>Level</th><th>Indicator</th><th>Measurement unit</th><th>Deadline for completion</th><th>Note regarding the selection of indicators</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">A1</td><td>Outcome</td><td>Number of research infrastructure management processes introduced or upgraded</td><td>process</td><td>Three years after project completion</td><td rowspan="2">Applicants are required to select the indicator and set a target value for it at the project level. Indicator selection is mandatory.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Description: This indicator measures the total number of research infrastructure management processes that have been improved, or newly implemented within research institutions. These processes may include governance frameworks, operational workflows, maintenance procedures, access and usage policies, resource allocation, data management systems, digital management tools, coordination and communication mechanisms or efficiency and sustainability improvements related to research infrastructure. The objective of introducing and upgrading these processes is to enhance the efficiency, accessibility, and sustainability of research infrastructure, ensuring that facilities are better managed and more effectively utilized by both researchers and industry partners.
Source of verification: Progress reports, final report and/or survey in the post-implementation period.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">A2</td><td>Outcome</td><td>Number of staff who apply new skills and knowledge</td><td>staff member</td><td>Three years after project completion</td><td rowspan="2">Applicants are required to select the indicator and set a target value for it at the project if the project proposal includes staff participating in training.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Description: This indicator measures the number of RI staff who have applied the skills and knowledge gained through training, workshops, or other capacity-building activities supported by the project. The training topics may, for example, include research infrastructure management, operational efficiency, equipment maintenance, collaboration with industry, IP management and commercialization strategies, and strategic planning.
Source of verification: report and/or survey in the post-implementation period.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Aa1</td><td>Output</td><td>Number of research infrastructure management process introductions or upgrades initiated</td><td>process</td><td>Project completion</td><td rowspan="2">Applicants are required to select the indicator and set a target value for it at the project level. Indicator selection is mandatory.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Description: This output tracks the number of new or improved research infrastructure management processes that have been initiated as part of the project. These improvements may involve the development of governance frameworks, operational workflows, maintenance procedures, access and usage policies, resource allocation, data management systems, digital management tools, coordination and communication mechanisms or efficiency and sustainability improvements for research facilities. The initiation of these processes demonstrates institutional commitment to strengthening the efficiency, sustainability, and accessibility of research infrastructure.
Source of verification: Business development plan, progress reports and final report.</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Ab1</td><td>Output</td><td>Number of staff participating in training</td><td>staff member</td><td>Project completion</td><td rowspan="2">Applicants are required to select the indicator and set a target value for it at the project if the project proposal includes staff participating in training.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Description: The indicator refers to the number of individuals who have taken part in training sessions, workshops, or other capacity-building activities supported by the project. The training topics may include, for example, research infrastructure management, operational efficiency, equipment maintenance, collaboration with industry, IP management and commercialization strategies, and strategic planning.
Source of verification: Progress reports and final report.</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><th colspan="6">[B] Specific objective: Increasing collaboration between research organizations and private sector</th></tr>
<tr><th>Indicator label</th><th>Level</th><th>Indicator</th><th>Measurement unit</th><th>Deadline for completion</th><th>Note regarding the selection of indicators</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">B1</td><td>Outcome</td><td>Number of collaborative projects contracted after project completion (between research organizations and enterprises)</td><td>project</td><td>Three years after project completion</td><td rowspan="2">Applicants are required to include the indicator and set a target value at project level. Indicator selection is mandatory.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Description: The indicator refers to the number of new collaborative projects between enterprises and research organizations, involving the beneficiary of the supported project, which are contracted after the completion of the supported project’s implementation. The beneficiary of the supported project may be involved as either the main beneficiary or a partner in implementing the new project. The indicator takes into account projects contracted based on submitted project proposals to competitive sources of financing.
Source of verification: report and/or survey during the post-implementation period, document or link to a public source verifying the application status.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">B2</td><td>Outcome</td><td>Number of contracted projects for providing services to the economy</td><td>project</td><td>Three years after project completion</td><td rowspan="2">Applicants are required to include the indicator and set a target value at project level. Indicator selection is mandatory.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Description: The indicator measures the number of projects or contracts signed by HEI and PRI with private sector companies, businesses, or other economic entities for the provision of services on market terms. These services may include research support, product development, technological consultations, testing, or any other specialized service offered by the research infrastructure to meet the needs of the economy.
The number of contracted projects serves as an indicator of the institution’s successful collaboration with the private sector, demonstrating how research infrastructure is being utilized to provide tangible services that support economic development, innovation, and commercialization.
Source of verification: report and/or survey during the post-implementation period.</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><th colspan="6">[C] Specific objective: Enhanced utilization of research infrastructure</th></tr>
<tr><th>Indicator label</th><th>Level</th><th>Indicator</th><th>Measurement unit</th><th>Deadline for completion</th><th>Note regarding the selection of indicators</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">C1</td><td>Outcome</td><td>Number of unique infrastructure users on annual basis</td><td>user</td><td>Three years after project completion</td><td rowspan="2">Applicants are required to include the indicator and set a target value at project level. Indicator selection is mandatory.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Description: The indicator measures the total number of distinct users who access and utilize the research infrastructure on an annual basis. A "unique user" refers to an individual or organization that uses the infrastructure at least once within a given calendar year, regardless of frequency of use. Users may include researchers, industry partners, students, external collaborators, etc.
Source of verification: Equipment usage logs, reservation system, reports, post-implementation survey.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">C2</td><td>Outcome</td><td>Number of hours of equipment utilization on annual basis</td><td>hour</td><td>Three years after project completion</td><td rowspan="2">Applicants are required to include the indicator and set a target value at project level. Indicator selection is mandatory.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Description: The indicator refers to the number of hours spent using the research infrastructure, for conducting internal or collaborative research activities, or provision of commercialization services to enterprises. The indicator measures the total number of hours of active use, on an annual basis. Users may include researchers, research partners and collaborators, or entities that use the infrastructure on commercial terms.
Source of verification: Equipment usage logs, reservation system, reports, post-implementation survey.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">BCa1</td><td>Output</td><td>Number of networking events organized and attended</td><td>event</td><td>Project completion</td><td rowspan="2">Applicants are required to include the indicator and set a target value at project level if the project proposal includes organizing or attending networking events.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Description: The indicator refers to the total number of networking events organized and attended with project support to facilitate connections between research institutions and private sector partners.
These events include, for example, workshops, conferences, seminars, matchmaking events, and collaborative discussions aimed at fostering research partnerships, technology transfer, and industry collaboration.
The number of events indicate the extent to which research institutions are engaging with the private sector and the research community.
Source of verification: Progress reports and final report, agreements.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">BCa2</td><td>Output</td><td>Number of participants at networking events organized</td><td>participant</td><td>Project completion</td><td rowspan="2">Applicants are required to include the indicator and set a target value at project level if the project proposal includes organizing networking events.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Description: The indicator refers to the number of participants (research organizations, enterprises, other) in events, organized with project support, to facilitate connections between research institutions and private sector partners. If more than one person represents the same organization at a single event, they are counted as one participant. Likewise, if representatives of the same entity attend multiple events, the entity is counted only once.
Source of verification: Progress reports and the final report, attendance lists, etc.</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="2">BCb1</td><td>Output</td><td>Number of research infrastructure visibility events organized</td><td>event</td><td>Project completion</td><td rowspan="2">Applicants are required to include the indicator and set a target value at project level if the project proposal includes organizing visibility events.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Description: The indicator measures the number of events organized with project support, with the specific goal of enhancing the visibility of infrastructure and expanding its outreach. These events may include conferences, workshops, webinars, social media campaigns, public talks, or other activities aimed at promoting awareness, engaging stakeholders, or reaching new audiences.
Source of verification: Progress reports and the final report.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">BCb2</td><td>Output</td><td>Number of participants at research infrastructure visibility events organized</td><td>participant</td><td>Project completion</td><td rowspan="2">Applicants are required to include the indicator and set a target value at project level if the project proposal includes organizing visibility events.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Description: The indicator refers to the number of participants in events organized with project support to increase the visibility and outreach of research infrastructure.
Source of verification: Progress reports and the final report, attendance lists, etc.</td></tr>
</table>

4. Evaluation of the Call

By applying to this Call, applicants consent to the use of complete application documentation and data collected during the evaluation of project proposals for the purpose of conducting an impact evaluation of the Call, regardless of whether they receive support or not. Access to this data will enable a proper evaluation of the Call’s impact. This consent is given through a signed declaration by the applicant (Annex II.).

Before submitting a project proposal, the applicant is required to complete a baseline survey.

Annex IV. of this document outlines the indicative content of the baseline survey content. The baseline survey must be completed exclusively via the provided link. The applicants confirm in the declarations that they have fully completed the survey form.

This survey will collect data on the applicant’s prior achievements of the applicant related to research and development activities. The responses gathered will be used to evaluate the impact of the Call.

If the MSEY decides to conduct an impact evaluation of the Call, surveys will be administered after project completion and in subsequent years, with the purpose of collecting data on the results achieved by the applicants compared to the baseline situation reported at project submission. By applying to this Call, the applicant commits to participating in these additional surveys, should the MSEY decide to conduct them, and consent to the use of collected data for impact evaluation purposes, regardless of whether they receive support or not. This consent is also provided through the signed declarations by the applicant (Annex II. of this document). The MSEY will ensure that any future surveys do not create an undue administrative burden for respondents, ensuring adherence to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) particularly with regards to purpose limitation and data minimization principles.

5. Eligible applicants

Eligible applicants are **Croatian public higher education institutions (HEI)** and **public research institutes (PRI)**, established in accordance with the Law on Higher Education and Scientific Activity (OG 119/22), which conduct research activities as defined in their statutes or other relevant acts proving their legal status.

The applicants must prove that at the time of application, they are not in any of the exclusion situations listed in Annex I. Conditions for the preparation and implementation of projects within the DIGIT Project (Section 1.1.).

An applicant may submit more than one project proposal under this Call. However, number of grant agreements that can be concluded within this Call with a single applicant/beneficiary will be limited based on the number of employees in their organization, as shown in the following table.

Table 2. Maximum number of Grant Agreements per applicant/beneficiary

Number of employees at the applicant organization	Maximum number of grant agreements that can be signed per applicant
1-500	1
501+	2

The relevant number of employees is determined by the last month for which salaries were paid prior to the application submission date, regardless of the number of hours worked by individual employees[6].

The applicant is submitting the project proposal independently, without any partners.

6. Budget of the Call and the intensity of grant support

The budget allocated for this Call is EUR 5 million with the minimum and maximum grant amounts specified in the table below.

Table 3. Budget of the Call

Minimum grant amount (in EUR)	Maximum grant amount (in EUR)	Total allocation (in EUR)
60,000.00	350,000.00	5,000,000.00

The intensity of grant support for eligible costs may reach up to 100%, taking into account the maximum grant amount that can be awarded per project.

7. Project duration

For this Call, the maximum project duration is **36 months**. All project activities and payments must be completed by October 31, 2028.

[6] This information must be evident in the submitted JOPPD form (Report on income, personal income tax and surtax, and mandatory insurance contributions).

8. Eligibility of projects, activities and costs

This section defines the eligibility requirements for the projects, including the types of eligible projects, activities that can be funded, and the specific costs that qualify for funding under the Call.

8.1. Eligible projects

The general eligibility criteria for projects are the following:

- The project must be in accordance with the objective of the Call and must contribute to the results framework of the Call;
- The project must be implemented independently by the applicant as defined in Section 5. of the Guidelines for Applicants;
- The project is implemented in an acceptable geographical area, on the territory of the Republic of Croatia (with the exception of travel abroad activities);
- The project is not physically or financially completed, nor will it be completed before the signing of the Grant Agreement;
- The project is ready to commence the activities, with an anticipated duration of up to 36 months, ensuring that all activities and payments are completed by October 31, 2028;
- The project includes eligible activities and costs;
- The project activities are not listed on the International Finance Corporation (IFC) exclusion list of activities, nor are they otherwise excluded by the Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF) as described in Annex I. Conditions for the preparation and implementation of projects within the DIGIT Project;
- The amount of the requested grant is within the prescribed allowable amount of grant funds;
- The project respects the principle of non-cumulativeness, i.e. it does not represent double financing;
- The project is in accordance with Horizontal principles and Ethics as described in Annex I. Conditions for the preparation and implementation of projects within the DIGIT Project;
- The project can be classified as having up to moderate risk for environmental and social impacts, based on the World Bank's environmental and social policies criteria and the ESMF (Section 2.3 Risk Classification Guidelines), as described in Annex I. Conditions for the preparation and implementation of projects within the DIGIT Project.

8.2. Eligible activities

Applicants are required, as part of the project proposal, to prepare and submit a detailed Business Development Plan for Research Center (hereafter: BDP). The BDP is a key strategic document in which applicants are expected to present a clear vision for the development of their RC, supported by a structured and results-oriented plan to strengthen the RC’s operations, enhance the use of research infrastructure, and increase cooperation with industry and other external users.

Applicants are expected to prepare a results-oriented BDP that outline the current state of their RC and provides a concrete and realistic roadmap for achieving measurable improvement during and beyond the project implementation period.

The BDP should clearly demonstrate:

- the current state of the RC (in terms of research outputs, resources, personnel, infrastructure, and overall position in relevant field),
- the challenges and gaps it faces,
- the opportunities for development available,
- and most importantly, the specific results the applicant commits to achieving.

Special attention should be given to strengthening management processes, optimizing infrastructure use, building staff capacity, expanding collaboration with industry, and increasing the visibility and sustainability of the RC. It is important to emphasise that BDP is not a purely strategic or descriptive document it represents a formal commitment by the applicant to implement targeted activities and deliver concrete results within and after the project implementation period. The implementation of the plan and the achievement of its results will be closely monitored throughout the project.

To ensure effective implementation of the BDP, applicants are required to employ a dedicated business development manager (hereafter: Manager). This individual will be responsible for the execution of the BDP, coordination of activities, monitoring progress, and acting as the main contact point for all the relevant stakeholders. The Manager will play a key role in driving long-term business growth and ensuring the RC remains competitive and aligned with its strategic goals through identifying growth opportunities, developing strategies, market presence, and customer base. This role involves building and maintaining relationships with different stakeholders, analysing market trends, negotiating deals, and collaborating with internal teams to develop new offerings, products, services, or markets.

The MSEY will carry out monitoring visits to verify the implementation of the BDP, specifically through site visits and structured interviews with the manager, employees and users. These visits are planned approximately after 6th, 18th, 24th, and 36th month of the project. The purpose of these monitoring activities is to:

- assess the progress made in implementing the BDP,
- evaluate the achievement of planned results,
- identify potential obstacles or delays, and
- where necessary, revise and update the BDP to reflect the real implementation context.

Any amendments to the BDP during implementation can be made only in agreement with the MSEY, based on findings from monitoring activities and progress towards key results.

Applicants should be aware that the project will be assessed not only on the quality of the proposed plan but also on the target results. The BDP should therefore, with reference to the ToC and results framework, define:

- clear objectives,
- measurable indicators,
- realistic but ambitious outputs and outcomes that the applicant is committed to delivering.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to prepare the BDP in a way that ensures feasibility of implementation while also demonstrating a clear ambition for long-term development and impact beyond the project duration. Further guidance on the recommended structure and content of the BDP is provided in Annex VI. of this document. Applicants are also advised to follow the framework for improving the use and operation of national RIs given in *OECD STI Policy Paper Optimising the Operation and Use of National Research Infrastructures*[7] particularly the sections related to user-base optimization, as detailed in Chapters 3 and 4 of the document. Applicants are encouraged to align their project proposals with these recommendations and address how their activities will contribute to optimizing the use of research infrastructure while broadening its societal impact.

All categories of activities listed below are **mandatory** for all applicants. However, **within each activity, applicants may select specific sub-activities** that are most relevant to the needs and strategic development goals of their Research Centre (RC), unless otherwise specified. Certain sub-activities explicitly marked as **mandatory** must be included in the proposal.

Eligible activities are as follows:

1. **Organizational strengthening and process optimization**

- Assessment and mapping of existing internal processes,
- Developing standardized operating procedures for key functions,
- Development of internal collaboration mechanisms,
- Defining procedures for collaboration with external stakeholders,
- Establishing procedures for technology transfer and commercialization, such as frameworks, guidelines, IP protocols, etc.

2. **Optimization of access to infrastructure and services**

- Conducting periodic surveys to gather user feedback and improve processes and protocols **(mandatory sub-activity)**.
- Creating a digital inventory of research equipment and/or resources such as data, technologies, etc.**:** it should involve developing a structured, searchable database that provides comprehensive, up-to-date information on available infrastructure and/or assets, enabling efficient management, internal planning, and improved accessibility for all users,
- Developing and optimizing protocols for equipment use, access, and resource sharing between internal teams and external partners, or any other users, based on FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable) principles,
- Developing and/or implementing advanced software solutions for resource optimization and utilization (e.g., pricing, service offerings, available services, online scheduling/booking systems, data-sharing platforms, monitoring, and tracking systems for usage of facilities and equipment, such as number of users and hours, etc),
- Maintenance and upgrades of existing research infrastructure (such as servicing and maintenance of existing research equipment).

3. **Capacity building and competence development**

- Organizing and participating in trainings, workshops, conferences, etc., on business development, intellectual property (IP) management, technology transfer, commercialization strategies, project management and leadership skills and related topics for academic and non-academic staff,

[7] Optimising The Operation And Use Of National Research Infrastructures, OECD, link

- Engaging external advisors (local or international) to provide mentorship in collaboration and partnership development.

4. Networking and collaboration

- Promoting the Research Centre's capabilities and collaboration opportunities to the private sector (e.g., marketing materials, digital campaigns),
- Organizing and participating in conferences, workshops, networking events, and industry days to showcase the infrastructure's capabilities,
- Establishing partnerships with similar infrastructures (national, EU and/or international) to share best practices,
- Developing and implementing a database to monitor existing and new collaborations between academic institutions and the private sector,
- Regular reporting and data analysis to support the management and improvement of collaboration activities,
- Technology scouting services – identifying and connecting relevant research teams with industry,
- External services related to collaboration agreements, intellectual property management, and business model development, technology transfer, etc.

5. Promotion and visibility

- Developing marketing materials such as brochures, videos, and case studies showcasing success stories,
- Launching targeted campaigns to attract new users from academia and industry,
- Maintaining an active online presence through social media and a dedicated website,
- Publication of research papers and disseminating research findings (e.g., organizing public events, developing media content), organizing and/or participating at national and international conferences, meetings, seminars and workshops.

6. Project management

- Encompasses all administrative and managerial aspects necessary for the successful execution of the project, including planning, coordination, monitoring, and reporting. Procurement activities are also included. Effective project management ensures that the project remains on track, within budget, and meets its objectives.

8.3. Eligible and ineligible costs

The project must not represent double funding. All costs[8] must meet the following criteria:

- They are incurred from the date of project proposal submission and no later than October 31, 2028;
- They are connected to the project and comply with the rules set out in the Call documentation;
- They are identifiable and verifiable, through being recorded in the applicant's accounting records and determined in accordance with applicable accounting standards and generally accepted accounting principles; and

[8] Applicants must provide a budget plan (within Application form) with costs that are fully in compliance with the eligibility criteria.

- They comply with the requirements of applicable tax and social legislation.

The main sets of eligible costs are as follows:

A. Personnel costs:

- **Personnel costs** for newly employed staff: one manager **(mandatory)**, one or more technicians, or other experts as needed **(optional)**. These costs correspond to gross salary level 2, encompassing the total employment cost to the organization. This includes all employer contributions and taxes required to ensure the net salary payment to the employee, as well as transport allowances and non-taxable costs. The minimum employment level of each newly employed person is 50% of full-time (i.e. part-time employment at 0.5 FTE).

B. Other eligible costs:

- **Recruitment costs** (advertisements, selection procedures);
- **Travel cost** for project staff (transportation, accommodation and daily allowances) for participating in networking and collaboration activities as well as promotion and visibility; this also includes registration fees for conferences, workshops, and trainings;
- **Membership fees** for clusters, organizations, etc.;
- **Organization costs**, such as catering and venue expenses, for hosting networking and visibility activities;
- **Costs of developing** a digital collaboration platform;
- **External services** for feasibility studies, legal advisory services for IP, etc.,
- **Organization and participation costs** for capacity building and competence development, such as catering and venue expenses, fees, costs of external experts, study visits, etc.;
- **Fees** for external advisors and mentorship;
- **Development and implementation** of digital inventory of equipment and resources;
- **Software solutions** for resource management (development, licenses, implementation of solutions such as pricing tools, scheduling/booking systems, data-sharing platforms, monitoring systems, etc.);
- **Costs related to maintenance and upgrading** existing equipment and infrastructure;
- **Material costs** related to research infrastructure (e.g. consumables, maintenance)
- **Costs of conducting** surveys and data analysis;
- **Promotional and digital communication costs,** including promotional materials (e.g. videos, brochures, press releases), and digital campaign activities (e.g. social media advertising, SEO, website maintenance);
- **Outreach and public engagement costs,** including costs related to organizing or participating in conferences, public events, and media engagements;
- Administrative project management and procurement services;
- **Non-refundable** VAT.

In the BDP, the applicant must specify the cost for each newly employed staff member, as well as other eligible costs. Staff costs may account for up to 80% of the total project budget. While all eligible costs must be clearly indicated in the budget plan within BDP, they may be adjusted during project implementation (based on the on-site visits and expert evaluation), provided that the changes are justified and aligned with the overall project goals. Applicants remain responsible for ensuring realistic, transparent, and appropriate budget planning.

The following costs are not eligible:

- Costs incurred before the date of project proposal submission and after October 31, 2028;
- Purchase, rent, or leasing of land and existing buildings;
- Costs of construction works and related services;
- Cost of work and personal vehicles, as well as vessels used for commercial purposes;
- Second-hand equipment and instruments;
- Interest on debt, debt service charges and late payment charges;
- Bank charges, costs of guarantees and similar charges;
- Credits to third parties;
- Provisions for losses or potential future liabilities;
- Exchange losses;
- Refundable VAT;
- Fines, penalties and costs of litigation, except where litigation is an integral and necessary component for achieving the outcomes of the project; and
- Excessive or reckless expenditure.

9. Methodology for calculating personnel costs

As part of the implementation of the BDP, applicants are required to plan the employment of new staff necessary for the execution of project activities and achievement of planned results. This particularly refers to the obligatory employment of a manager but may also involve other expert profiles necessary for the implementation of specific activities within the project.

Employment of these individuals should be planned as part of the project activities, in line with the operational needs of the RC and the objectives of the BDP.

When planning salaries for new employee(s) within the project, applicants are required to:

1. Apply relevant regulations:

    - Ensure compliance with all relevant internal acts, salary regulations, and applicable national legislation/by-laws (including labour regulations, institutional salary policies, internal rules, and collective agreements, if applicable).

2. Ensure competitiveness and adequacy:

    - Propose a salary level that appropriately reflects the required qualifications, competencies, and responsibilities. This should take into account market conditions, the scope of responsibilities, the required expertise, and the need to attract and retain qualified personnel.

3. Include budget justification:

    - Provide a clear justification of the salary costs within the project budget. This justification should specify the position, key tasks and responsibilities, planned gross monthly salary, duration of employment (in months), and the basis for the proposed calculation.

4. Submission requirement:

    - Prior to the adoption of the Award decision, applicants must submit supporting documents used as a basis for salary calculation.

Personnel costs include gross salary level 2, which encompasses the total employee costs for the applicant, including all contributions and taxes necessary to ensure the net salary payment to the employee, including transport allowances and non-taxable costs. Applicants may include up to 20% increase in the calculation to account for projected staff expenditure growth in the coming years (eligible only if applicable, i.e. if the salary increase is conditional upon regulatory or institutional changes).

Personnel costs represents actual costs incurred and realized monthly and will be reported based on timesheets. Applicants must define the number of full working months for each new employee. Timesheets must be maintained for every employee working on the project and must be signed monthly by both the employee and the head of institution.

The calculation of personnel costs is subject to cost eligibility verification and budget cleaning, during which applicants will be requested to provide supporting documentation used as the basis for the calculation.

10. Instructions for the submission of project proposals

Project proposals must be written in English and submitted via the application portal eDIGIT available on the website https://digit.mzom.hr/. Please follow these instructions carefully to ensure your project proposal is properly submitted and considered:

1. **Access the application portal eDIGIT**: Applicants, either the authorized representative or the project manager, must create a user account on the application portal eDIGIT, if not already registered. This account will be used throughout the application process.
2. **Complete the baseline survey**: Applicants must complete the baseline survey which can be accessed at the following link:
    - https://croatiasurvey.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8uZWUpTc5drPuu2.

   The completion of the survey is mandatory before submitting the application. Please note that it is not necessary to upload a .pdf version of the completed surveys, but you may keep one for your own records.
3. **Complete the Application form**: Log in to the eDIGIT and accurately fill out the Application form. The content of the Application form is listed in the Annex III. of this document.
4. **Upload required documents and information**: Log in to eDIGIT and upload the required documents as listed in the table below.

Table 4. Submission of supporting documents

Document	Mandatory (yes/no)	Notes and document format
Declaration by the Applicant	Yes	Completed, signed, and stamped Annex II. (.pdf format) (English)
Business Development Plan for Research Center	Yes	Annex VI. (in .pdf format) (English)

5. **Review and finalize submission**: Carefully review the entire application and ensure all required fields and documents are completed and attached. Incomplete proposals may be disqualified from the evaluation process.
6. **Submit the application**: Once all required information and documents are prepared, submit the application via the application portal eDIGIT. Ensure the submission is completed before the specified deadline. The project proposal can be submitted by a person authorized to represent the applicant or by the project manager, who must be an employee of the applicant.
7. **Confirmation of submission**: After successful submission, the applicant will receive a submission confirmation. This confirmation should be retained as proof of submission.

Important notes:

- **Submission deadline**: Project proposals submitted after the deadline will not be accepted. It is advisable to complete the submission process well in advance of the deadline.
- **Electronic submission only**: All submissions must be made through the eDIGIT application portal. E-mail or paper submissions will not be accepted.
- **Completeness and accuracy**: The information provided in the project proposal application must be complete and accurate. The MSEY may request additional information if needed.

Before adopting an Award decision on funding and signing the Grant Agreement, applicants (only highest-ranking projects that meet the requirements and fall within allocation, i.e. those for which funds are available) need to prepare and submit documents listed in the table below.

Table 5. Submission of supporting documents before adopting an Award decision on funding and signing the Grant Agreement

Document	Mandatory (yes/no)	Notes and document format
Documents related to the calculation of personnel costs for applicants	Yes (only projects proposals with highest score that are within allocation)	Documents (.pdf or .zip format (if multiple documents are necessary)) related to the calculation of personnel costs for applicants: • Documents (acts) determining the gross salary amount – Salary decision (signed and stamped) based on the Section 9. of GfA, or equivalent, which clearly states the basis for salary calculation and the average monthly amount based on the number of months person will be employed (.pdf) (English); • Salary calculation methodology that clearly shows the method of determining the total cost of salary (.xls or .xlsx format) (Croatian).
Environmental and Social Screening Questionnaire (ESSQ)	Yes (only projects proposals with highest score that are within allocation)	Completed Environmental and Social Screening Questionnaire (ESSQ) (Annex V. of the Guidelines for Applicants), prepared by the applicant (.doc or .docx format). If the ESSQ results indicate the need for specific Environmental and Social (E&S) instruments, the applicant will be responsible for preparing the required documentation (such as the ESCOP, ESMP Checklist or ESMP) before the Award decision is made (English).

JOPPD form(s) (A page(s))	Yes (if more than one project proposal submitted by the aplicant is ranked within the available funding allocation)	For the last month for which salaries were paid (based on employment contract) prior to the application submission date – signed document (.pdf format) (Croatian).

11. Timetable and deadlines

This is a temporary open Call, and proposals must be submitted from June 13, 2025, at 09:00:00 (start date), until ~~September 1, 2025~~ October 1, 2025 at 16:00:00 (end date). Project proposals submitted after the deadline will not be accepted. The indicative timetable and deadlines are outlined in the following table.

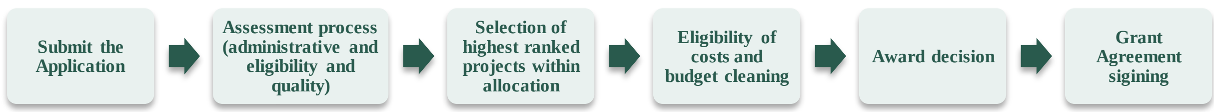
Table 6. Indicative timetable and deadlines

Indicative timetable and deadlines	
Start date for receiving project proposals	June 13, 2025 - 9:00:00
Project proposal submission deadline	~~September 1, 2025~~ October 1, 2025- 16:00:00
Project proposal evaluation results	45 days after project proposal submission
Grant Agreement signing	60 days from the final ranking

12. Grant award process

For this Call, funding will be provided to the projects that meet administrative, eligibility and quality criteria and rank highest based on the points scored. The process from the submission of project proposal to the signing of the Grant Agreement is illustrated in the following chart.

Figure 2. Grant award process



After the submission of project proposals and before adopting an Award decision on funding, applicants (upon the MSEY's request) must prepare and submit the following:

- Environmental and social screening questionnaire (ESSQ) (Annex V. of the Guidelines for Applicants). Only low and moderate risk activities are eligible for financing/award. If the ESSQ results indicate the need for specific Environmental and social (E&S) instruments, the applicant will be responsible for preparing the required documentation (such as the Environmental and Social Management Plan (ESMP), ESMP Checklist, Environmental and Social Code of Practice (ESCOP)) before the Award decision on funding is made. Failure to submit any of the required documents will result in the application being automatically rejected, and no Award decision on funding will be adopted.
- Other documentation in accordance with the requirements elaborated in Table 5.

Stages in the grant award process for this Call are explained in the Section 2. of the Annex I., and applicants are strongly encouraged to review it thoroughly.

13. Other information

Any questions regarding the Call must be submitted via the eDIGIT application portal where potential applicants will be able to select the relevant Call (DIGIT.1.2.03) to submit their inquiries. The MSEY will respond to these questions through a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section, which will be published on the DIGIT Project website.

14. Data protection

The protection of personal data is based on the provisions of the Law on the Implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation (OG 42/18).

Personal data collected includes information about the applicant or authorized representative (name, surname, OIB, email, phone number). During the grant award process, personal information is kept confidential. Data related to stakeholders (e.g. name, surname, OIB, salary) involved in project implementation may also be collected. These data are processed for project preparation, evaluation, implementation, and auditing.

Personal data may be shared with entities responsible for implementing and monitoring the DIGIT Project and with individuals authorized by these entities to fulfil specific services.

Access to personal data is restricted to persons who require it in order to carry out their designated responsibilities.

Applicants and beneficiaries have the following rights regarding the protection of personal data:

- The right to access their personal data, i.e., the right to request confirmation of whether data are being processed and, if so, to request access and information on the processing as well as a copy of the processed personal data;
- The right to rectify inaccurate data and to supplement incomplete data;
- The right to erase personal data if such data are no longer necessary for the purposes for which they were collected, if they have been unlawfully processed, or after the expiry of the data retention period;
- The right to restrict the processing of personal data;
- The right to object to the processing of personal data;
- The right to file a complaint with the Croatian Personal Data Protection Agency.

Personal data will be stored as long as there is a purpose for it, and at most five years after the closure of the DIGIT Project.

Contact: Data Protection Officer: SzZOP@mzom.hr, Donje Svetice 38, 10000 Zagreb, tel: +385 1 4594 294.

15. Grievance Redress Mechanism

The MSEY has established a Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM) to receive and facilitate the resolution of complaints and concerns presented by applicants, beneficiaries, and any individuals, groups, or communities who feel affected or interested, or feel that they may be affected or otherwise interested in the activities of the projects and the DIGIT Project.

The GRM is also intended to prevent and mitigate the risk of corruption, reduce the potential of conflict between the beneficiary, contracted subjects (services or goods), and the community, mitigate environmental and social risks and impacts, and allow stakeholders to provide practical suggestions and opinions to ensure that the Call remains accountable and transparent to the beneficiaries. The GRM is prepared to capture complaints and refer them to the relevant sectors to obtain solutions within reasonable time frames.

Contact details of the MSEY GRM: a) e-mail address: grmdigit@mzom.hr; or b) postal address: Ministarstvo znanosti, obrazovanja i mladih, Uprava za znanost i tehnologiju, Sektor za programe i projekte Europske Unije, Donje Svetice 38, 10000 Zagreb.

16. List of annexes

1) Annex I. Conditions for the preparation and implementation of projects within the DIGIT Project
2) Annex II. Declaration by the Applicant
3) Annex III. Application form
4) Annex IV. Indicative content of the baseline survey
5) Annex V. Environmental and social screening questionnaire
6) Annex VI. Business Development Plan for Research Center