



SOS2LearnDBS

Danube – Black Sea

Source to Sea: Leveraging community knowledge and action for restoring the Danube River basin and the Black Sea region

TRANSITION AGENDAS

1ST Transition Agendas Open Call

CALL CONDITIONS

OC-TAg1-SoS2LearnDBS-2026

Call deadline: 11th December 2026 17:00 (Brussels Time)

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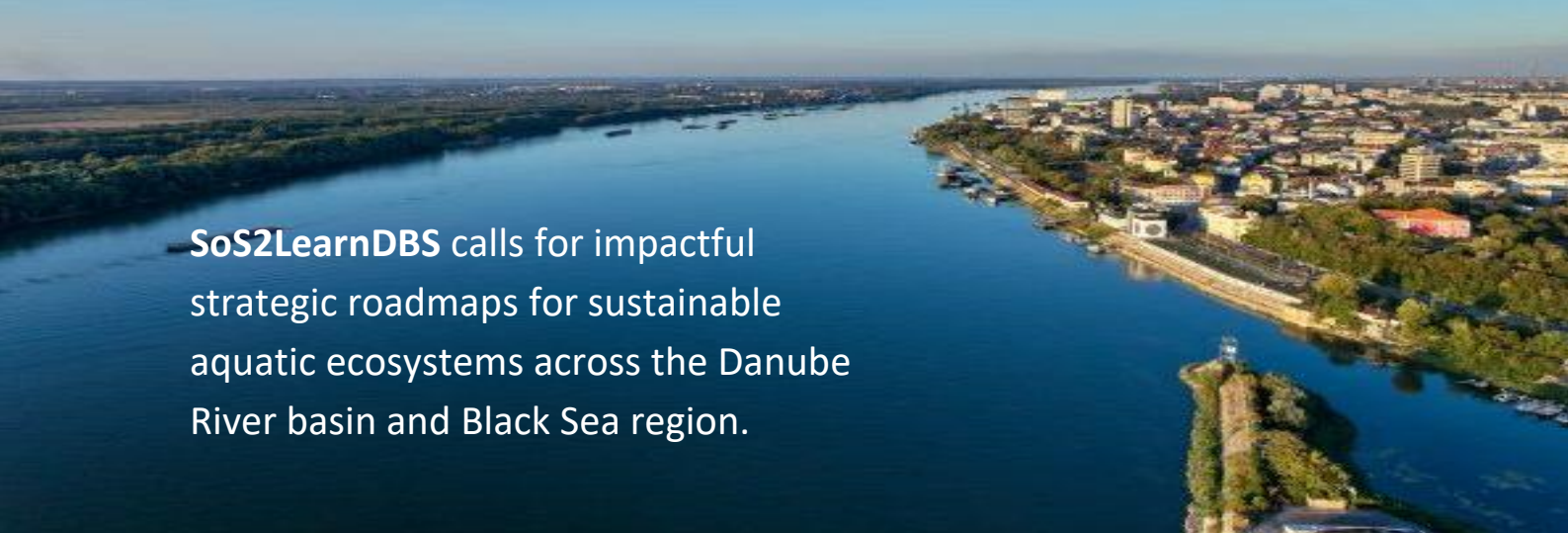
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SoS2LearnDBS calls for impactful strategic roadmaps for sustainable aquatic ecosystems across the Danube River basin and Black Sea region.

Call Snapshot

What do we fund?	Who can apply?	Where?
Development of Strategic Roadmaps (Transition Agendas - TAGs) that facilitate the transition towards more sustainable and resilient aquatic ecosystems. Projects (4 to 12 months) will contribute to reaching the targets of the Mission ' Restore our ocean and waters by 2030 '.	Consortia of 2 to 4 independent legal entities located in EU Member States or Horizon Europe Associated Countries . The consortium leader shall be based in the Danube-Black Sea region, and at least one partner must have an established link with the local/regional communities.	Project activities must target and take place in one of the five target regions: Upper Danube, Middle Danube, Lower Danube, Danube Delta, or Black Sea . In this Call, we aim to fund a minimum of 1 and a maximum of 3 projects per region .
When?	Funding	Support provided
Submission deadline: 11 th December 2026, 17:00 CET (Brussels time) Projects expected starting date: May 2027	Three funding tiers: €25,000-€50,000 or €50,000-€75,000 or €75,000-€100,000 per project Maximum per organisation: €60,000	Selected projects will receive dedicated technical assistance from SoS2LearnDBS partners, including capacity-building activities, networking opportunities, access to the Mission Implementation Platform, and communication support throughout implementation.

About SoS2LearnDBS project

SoS2LearnDBS - Source to Sea: Leveraging community knowledge and action for restoring the Danube River basin and the Black Sea region, is a Research and Innovation Action funded under the Horizon Europe Programme by the European Commission (Grant Agreement No. 101217667).

SoS2LearnDBS is dedicated to restoring the ecosystems of the **Danube River Basin and the Black Sea region** through the **active participation of local communities**. The project seeks to empower local stakeholders with the tools, knowledge and support to implement sustainable water management practices, thus contributing to the protection and restoration of freshwater and marine ecosystems.

SoS2LearnDBS invites organisations to submit their proposals through calls for funding. The present document describes the **conditions for the 1st Open Call for Transition Agendas**.

1. CALL DESCRIPTION

1.1 Call Scope and objectives

The Danube-Black Sea basin faces distinct yet interconnected environmental, social, and governance challenges that require **locally adapted, community-driven solutions** to facilitate the transition towards more sustainable and resilient aquatic ecosystems within the **Danube region and the Black Sea**.¹ The main objective of the SoS2LearnDBS 1st TAG Open Call is to **support the development of strategic roadmaps that guide communities in achieving the objectives of the Mission "Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030" in the communities**, with a particular focus on the objectives that are most relevant to the specific community.

What is a Transition Agenda?

A Transition Agenda (henceforth designated as TAGs) is a community-led, multi-year roadmap that sets out where a community wants to go, what needs to change to get there, and how that change will be achieved and financed. It brings relevant stakeholders together around a shared vision and defines the priorities, actions, responsibilities, resources, and investment pathways needed to contribute to the objectives of the EU Mission "Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030".

TAGs are not individual projects but **strategic and participatory planning instruments** that guide long-term transformation toward sustainable water resource management and ecosystem restoration. Their focus is on **strengthening governance, fostering active stakeholder engagement, establishing a shared vision for development, and identifying future investment priorities**. TAGs should be regarded as practical tools designed to support local governments, civil society organisations, and local communities in taking an active role in managing change. They serve as strategic roadmaps for communities, outlining the specific steps, investments, and policies that an organisation, city, or community must take or shift from an old, unsustainable model to a new, future-proof one. TAGs should facilitate the identification and development of new pathways for transitioning from existing (or emerging) pressures toward a more inclusive, sustainable, and circular blue economy.

The TAG project shall:

- Outline how specific results and impacts will be achieved, supporting ongoing and future activities to meet the Mission's goals.
- Include a plan for a defined number of years concerning the objectives set, covering, for example, expected outcomes, results, impact, ways to achieve them and ways to bring in financing to support the achievement of these objectives.
- Indicate how specific results and ideally also their impacts are expected to materialise in order to ensure the actual achievement of the objectives.
- Serve as a basis for further planning of follow-up activities by the actors involved, particularly actions to meet the Mission Ocean and Waters objectives/targets, to be subsequently implemented with the financial support of various funds (e.g., EU structural funds/national/regional funds).

¹ For the purposes of this call Danube-Black Sea region includes the following countries: Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Poland, Italy, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Türkiye and Albania.

1.2 Contribution for EU Mission objectives and local/regional challenges

TAg projects are primarily planning and transition-oriented actions, focused on developing a practical roadmap for future change rather than on the large-scale physical deployment of solutions. Any implementation activities should be clearly linked to the development, validation or operationalisation of a TAg.

Furthermore, TAg projects must identify and align with **environmental objectives and targets they seek to enable**, namely those related to the EU Mission “Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030” and those specific to the Danube – Black Sea Region. Concretely, funded projects under this Call must contribute to at least one of the three objectives of the EU Mission “Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030”, and targets². The three Mission objectives are:

- **Objective 1: Protect and restore marine and freshwater ecosystems and biodiversity.**
- **Objective 2: Prevent and eliminate pollution of our ocean, seas and waters.**
- **Objective 3: Make the sustainable blue economy carbon-neutral and circular.**

For more details about the objectives and targets of the EU Mission “Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030”, please consult the “Guidelines for developing a Transition Agenda”.

Funded TAg projects must also **address at least one priority pillar of the Danube -Black Sea region**. The priority pillars defined for the Region are:

1. Reduction of water resource pollution (municipal, industrial, and agricultural pollution).
2. Sustainable water quantity management and climate adaptation (droughts, floods, declining water levels, irrigation).
3. Restoration and protection of ecosystems and biodiversity (wetlands, riverside channels, habitats, fragmentation).
4. Improvement of urban water management and protection of water sources (sewerage, urban runoff, drinking water sources).
5. Strengthening governance and cross-border cooperation (Danube–Black Sea region, institutions, policies, communities).

For more information about the regional priority pillars, please consult the “Guidelines for developing a Transition Agenda”.

1.3 Type of activities that can be funded

The 1st TAg Open Call funds strategic, participatory activities that guide local communities toward long-term water restoration, improved governance, and climate resilience. Eligible activities are those related to **creating and implementing the TAg**, focusing on sustainable environmental practices, stakeholder engagement, and long-term planning, such as (non-exclusive examples): **co-designing blueprints, conducting baseline assessments, organising stakeholder co-creation workshops, establishing governance/ RACI frameworks, testing monitoring protocols or data platforms, mapping regulatory risks.**

² As described in the implementation plan of the Mission “Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030” https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-09/ocean_and_waters_implementation_plan_for_publication.pdf

The activities proposed for the development of the TAg are expected to:

- Promote the co-creation of solutions by bringing together a diverse range of actors, including local communities, NGOs, public authorities, and businesses, to work collaboratively on tailored TAg.
- Empower local and regional stakeholders to take the lead in shaping and executing TAg that align with broader European and global environmental objectives, particularly those related to the sustainable management of water resources, climate resilience, and biodiversity conservation.
- Support the development of innovative approaches that are both context-specific and scalable (effective in addressing the unique challenges of each region but also contribute to the overall mission of achieving sustainable and resilient aquatic environments).

The resulting TAg roadmap supported by this Call will serve as the blueprint for follow-up measures to be subsequently implemented and scaled using larger public or private funding streams (such as EU structural funds, Interreg, LIFE, or municipal budgets).

1.4 Available Budget and Funding Structure

Under this Call, a maximum of fifteen (15) projects will be selected for funding. The budget structure and funding parameters are summarised below (Table 1).

Table 1 - Overview of Funding Parameters for the SoS2LearnDBS 1st TAg Open Call

Parameter	Description
Total budget available	€1,125,000 for the OC-TAg1-SoS2LearnDBS-2026 Open Call ³ ;
Number of projects to be funded	Maximum of 15 TAg
Minimum and Maximum funding per project*	Funding tier 1: €25,000-€50,000 per TAg For designing more targeted small-scale TAg addressing specific regional or thematic challenges. Funding tier 2: €50,000-€75,000 per TAg For designing medium-scale TAg addressing specific regional or thematic challenges involving a wider variety of stakeholders and activities. Funding tier 3: €75,000-€100,000 per TAg For designing larger-scale TAg, addressing more complex challenges, involving a wider variety of stakeholders and aiming for broader impact.
Maximum funding per individual organisation	€60,000 (only applicable to Funding Tiers 2 and 3)
Project duration	Between 4 and 12 months
Nr of actions to be funded by region of the Danube River basin and Black Sea	Minimum 1 (one) and maximum 3 (three) grants per region, regardless of the funding tier, in the following regions: Upper Danube, Middle Danube, Lower Danube, Danube Delta, Black Sea.
Type of grant:	Lump sum ⁴

³ The SOS2LearnDBS Consortium reserves the right not to award all available funds or to redistribute them between the open calls planned within the project, depending on the quality of the applications received and the results of the evaluation.

⁴ Lump Sum is a simplified funding mechanism where the EU contribution is paid as a fixed amount without the need to report actual costs. Payments are made based on the completion of predefined and agreed activities and its quality level, not based on real cost reimbursement. This model makes the process more efficient for beneficiaries.

Funding rate:	100% of eligible costs (co-financing is not mandatory)
Cost categories	Personnel costs: staff working on the project, based on expected effort and real salary costs; Travel and accommodation: Project-related travel, accommodation and subsistence. <i>Note: consortia are expected to reserve a percentage of their budget for “travel and accommodation” to participate in joint activities with the SoS2Learn consortium, as detailed in the next row (“Minimum budget to be reserved”).</i> Equipment: Depreciation costs for equipment used in the project⁵; Other goods, works and services: Expenses for other items or services directly linked to the project (e.g. consumables, dissemination materials, printing, translations, materials, supplies, monitoring equipment, educational materials, etc.); Subcontracting: Costs for external providers contracted to perform specific tasks that cannot be carried out by the project beneficiary(ies). <u>It cannot exceed 30% of the total requested grant.</u> Indirect costs: Flat rate of 25% applied to direct costs (following Horizon Europe rules).
Minimum budget to be reserved under “travel and accommodation” for joint activities with the SoS2LearnDBS consortium	• Funding Tier 1 (€25,000–€50,000): Minimum 10% of the total project budget reserved for joint activities. • Funding Tier 2 (€50,000–€75,000): Minimum 5% of the total project budget reserved for joint activities. • Funding Tier 3 (€75,000–€100,000): Minimum 3% of the total project budget reserved for joint activities.
No-profit rule applies:	Beneficiaries cannot make a profit from the project activities or the grant received
No double funding:	Projects cannot receive funding from multiple EU sources for the same activities. In particular, organisations participating in consortia selected under the SoS2LearnDBS Community-Led (CLed) Call are not eligible to apply for the SoS2LearnDBS TAg Call.
Indicative distribution of the funds*	• For Tier 1 Projects: Pre-financing of 50% of the grant following Sub-Grant Agreement (SGA) signature; Final payment of 50% after the submission and approval of the Final Report. • For Tier 2 and Tier 3 Projects: Pre-financing of 35% of the grant following Sub-Grant Agreement (SGA) signature; Interim payment of 20% of the grant after the submission and approval of the mid-term report; Final payment of 45% after the submission and approval of the final report.

* Please note this is an indicative version of the funds distribution. It may be tailored to each project according with project duration, requested budget and financial viability (assessed for selected consortia through financial capacity check documents provided to the Open Call managers). All payments will be subject to tax and other reductions according to the laws of all involved countries.

⁵ Equipment costs may be eligible where they are necessary and directly linked to the development of the TAg. Applicants must demonstrate the necessity, direct relevance and proportionality of the equipment to the proposed activities. Only equipment that is directly necessary for the development of the TAg should be included. General-purpose office equipment, infrastructure, vehicles and equipment intended for the implementation of restoration or other measures identified in the TAg are not eligible.

1.5 Timeline

The indicative schedule for the different stages of the Open Call can be consulted in Table 2.

Table 2 - Open Call Timetable

Stage of the Open Call	Planned Date
Call opening	09 October 2026
Deadline for submission	11 December 2026
Evaluation& Selection	14 December - 30 March 2027
Information on evaluation results	31 March 2027
Sub-Grant Agreement signature	14 May 2027
Project execution timeframe	Start: from 15 May 2027 End: 14 June 2028 (max 12 months).

2. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

This section provides details on the eligibility criteria for the applications and for the consortium. Please review them to ensure your application meets all the requirements described in this section. Applications failing to meet any criterion will be deemed ineligible and will not be evaluated.

2.1 Eligibility criteria for Applications

I. Submission Requirements:

- The application is submitted through the Online Application Form available in the official [Open Calls platform](#), in English, before the submission deadline. Applications submitted in other languages, via other channels or after the deadline will not be considered.
- The requested supporting documents Technical Annex and Budget Overview are developed according to the templates provided in the [SoS2LearnDBS 1st Tag Call page](#), in English, and uploaded in the online application form.
- The requested supporting document Proof of Legal Registration must evidence that at least one consortium partner has an established link to the target region/community. The document needs to show the date and place of establishment, legal status, and the purpose/mission/objectives of the organisation.

II. Consortium Requirements:

- Each application is submitted by a consortium of **at least 2 and a maximum of 4** independent legal entities.
- The applicants are legally established in one of the eligible countries listed in section 2.2.1 and are a type of entity listed in section 2.2.2.
- At least one consortium partner must have an established link with the local/regional communities concerned (e.g. operating locally or running local projects)⁶.

III. Scope Alignment:

- The TAG proposed in the application addresses one of the Danube-Black Sea regions: Upper Danube, Middle Danube, Lower Danube, Danube Delta and Black Sea⁷.
- The proposed activities in the application contribute to at least one (1) objective of the EU Mission “Restore Our Ocean and Waters” and one target.⁸

⁶ Examples: regional authorities, local NGOs, municipalities, community associations, etc. that have clear links to the region in question.

⁷ For the purpose of this call, the five target regions are defined as functional cooperation areas rather than strict hydrological units. Countries are assigned to each region according to their territorial, socio-economic and governance links to the Danube-Black Sea macro-region. Some countries may be associated with more than one target region. Upper Danube Region: Germany, Austria, Czech Republic, Slovakia. Middle Danube Region: Hungary, Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia. Lower Danube Region: Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova. Danube Delta Region: Romania, Ukraine. Black Sea Region: Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia, Türkiye, Ukraine (subject to current geopolitical restrictions).

⁸ <https://missionoceanwaters.eu/#/>

IV. Funding requirements:

- The application falls within the limits of one of the available funding Tiers⁹:
 - Funding tier 1: €25,000-€50,000
 - Funding tier 2: €50,000-€75,000
 - Funding tier 3: €75,000-€100,000
- Each consortium organisation's individual budget does not exceed €60,000;
- Subcontracting costs do not exceed 30% of the overall project requested grant.

2.2 Eligibility criteria for Applicants

2.2.1 Consortium Composition

- Applications are presented by a consortium of a **minimum of 2 (two) and a maximum of 4 (four) legal entities** that are considered eligible under Horizon Europe rules.
- Natural persons (individuals) are not eligible to participate as consortium members or applicants.
- The **consortium leader** must be established in one of the following countries of the Danube-Black Sea region: Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Poland, Italy, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Türkiye or Albania.
- The consortium leader is a legal entity established no later than October 2024 (minimum of 2 years of existence).
- The **consortium partners** must be established in any EU Member State and Horizon Europe-associated country¹⁰.
- All consortium members are legally established and capable of implementing the proposed activities under Horizon Europe rules. There should not be any conflict of interest as detailed in Section 2.3.
- The consortia can be national-based (all members of the same country) or international (members of different eligible countries).
- An organisation may participate in multiple proposals and join different consortia. However, **an organisation can receive funding only once across the SoS2LearnDBS Calls**, whether as a coordinator or partner. The same activities cannot be funded by multiple EC Funding programs, namely by other Open Calls under HORIZON-MISS-2024-OCEAN-02-01 Projects.

2.2.2 Eligible type of applicants

The following types of entities are eligible to apply as consortium members:

- **Regional and local authorities**, including municipalities, regional administrations, administrative bodies and/or communities with decision-making authority responsible for Waterfront cities, islands or regions.

⁹ It is the responsibility of the Consortium Applicants to select the appropriate Tier based on total budget and scope of their proposed project activities. The selected Funding Tier is not necessarily connected with the project duration (4 to 12 months).

¹⁰ List of Participating Countries in Horizon Europe: https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/guidance/list-3rd-country-participation_horizon-euratom_en.pdf

- **Non-governmental organisations (NGOs), foundations, and other civil society organisations** engaged in local development, sustainability, or environmental protection.
- **Educational establishments and research-performing organisations.**
- **Locally based SMEs** active in areas relevant to the call (e.g., eco-innovation, water management, sustainable fisheries, sustainable tourism), provided this does not conflict with **State Aid rules**.
- **Professional associations, industry bodies, and community groups.**
- **Other formally constituted entities** fitting within the Mission Communities¹¹ framework, including those representing:
 - Waterfront cities, regions, and conservation communities.
 - Ports (including inland ports) and maritime infrastructure operators.
 - Islands and coastal/riverine communities.
 - Fishing communities, aquaculture producers, and other blue economy representatives.
 - Local Action Groups (LAGs) under Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) strategies¹².
 - Vessel operators and tourism sector representatives.

2.3 Conflict of Interest

Applications will not be accepted by entities:

- who are **partners (beneficiaries) of the SoS2LearnDBS project** (INOVA+, STEINBEIS, ADRM, UNIZAG-FSB, GEOECOMAR, BOKU, DDNI, UB, PKS, IAD, VSC-DA, MUNBUD),
- or any organisation that is declared to the European Commission as a **linked third party / affiliated entity** to one of the beneficiaries of the SoS2LearnDBS project;
- or any organisation that is directly or indirectly **controlled by, controls, or is under the same control as** a SoS2LearnDBS beneficiary. This includes, for example, parent companies, subsidiaries and other entities in the same corporate group where a SoS2LearnDBS beneficiary, alone or jointly with other SoS2LearnDBS beneficiaries, holds more than 25% of the capital or voting rights, or otherwise exercises decisive influence over management.

Any entity with a previous link to a **SoS2LearnDBS** beneficiary (e.g., spin-off) will not be accepted unless a minimum of 2 years (as of 1 November 2025) has passed since the termination of the link.

Applicants must not have any current and/or potential conflict of interest with the **SoS2LearnDBS 1st TAg** Open Call selection process and during the whole process of the Open Call. Applicants must formally and immediately notify the **SoS2LearnDBS** Project Coordinator of any situation constituting or likely to lead to a conflict of interest and take all the necessary steps to rectify this situation.

In case of doubts, applicants shall write to sosdb@inova.business during the proposal preparation.

¹¹ Mission Communities are diverse groups of stakeholders and actors, such as ports, islands, fishing communities, waterfront cities, and conservation groups, who are actively engaged in implementing actions to achieve the Mission's objectives.

¹² https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/guidelines/2014/guidance-on-community-led-local-development-in-european-structural-and-investment-funds

3. MONITORING FRAMEWORK

When developing their applications, candidates will provide a set of KPIs:

- KPIs that contribute to the EU Mission “Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030” (Common/Long-Term Impact KPI): All TAGs must align their expected impacts with the official EU Mission “Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030” monitoring framework managed by the European Environment Agency (EEA). Based on the EU Mission objective and target selected by the consortium, applicants are requested to define at least 1 KPI that describes the changes expected after the TAG ends, ensuring that the project's outcomes contribute to the pan-European assessment of Mission progress (see the table of EU Mission objectives and targets in the “Guidelines for developing a Transition Agenda”).
- KPIs that contribute to the Priority Pillars of the Danube-Black Sea region (Regional Impact KPI): Based on the regional Priority Pillar selected by the consortium, applicants are requested to define at least 1 KPI that describes the changes expected after the TAG ends (see the table of Danube-Black Sea region common Priority Pillars in the “Guidelines for developing a Transition Agenda”).
- Complementary KPIs that capture the specific added value of the proposed activities and outcomes of the TAG (Governance/Roadmap and Performance KPI): These indicators address the immediate outcomes and the development of the TAG itself, covering dimensions such as stakeholder engagement and water literacy, governance processes, and traditional ecological knowledge integration.

Following proposal selection, the final KPI set is formally validated during negotiations and embedded into the Sub-Grant Agreement (SGA) as contractual obligations. Progress toward these agreed KPIs serves as a mandatory condition for validating milestones and approving final grant payments.

4. EXPECTED OUTPUTS AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

The applications selected under this Call will receive financial support in the form of a grant, as well as technical support from the SoS2LearnDBS consortium, to support the development of a TAG. The selected TAG projects are expected to comply with the following implementation and reporting requirements:

- **Baseline Data Sheet:** Must be submitted **within one month** of the project start date, detailing the initial KPI values, baseline ecosystem/community conditions, and the target stakeholder network. To be developed based on a template provided by SoS2LearnDBS.
- **Mid-Term Progress Report:** Written periodic report submitted at the midpoint of project execution, documenting initial progress and KPI trajectories. Evaluated against the three contractual criteria for TAGs: relevance, feasibility, and effectiveness.

- **Final report** submitted upon completion of project activities. Evaluated against the same above-mentioned criteria, i.e. Relevance (alignment with the specific needs of the community), Feasibility (realistic and actionable plans with identified resources and timelines); Effectiveness (ability to empower communities to achieve long-term results). The final report includes:
 - Description of the final KPI values, stakeholder engagement outcomes, capacity-building activities, and lessons learned.
 - The TAG itself, i.e. a deliverable with a multi-year, participatory roadmap that guides the community or region towards sustainable water management, ecosystem restoration, and circular blue economy goals aligned with the EU Mission “Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030”.
 - Supporting evidence: Photos, videos and social media content reporting the process, outputs and events implemented within the project.
- **Finalised Strategic Roadmap:** Within six months after completing agenda development, beneficiaries must submit their finalised third-party roadmaps to allow for refinement based on early implementation feedback.
- **12–15 Month Post-Project Follow-Up Survey:** Agreement to participate in a short survey 12 to 15 months after project completion to provide evidence of sustained community involvement and long-term roadmap uptake.

Technical support

All projects selected for funding will receive technical support by the SoS2LearnDBS team to strengthen beneficiaries' capacity to develop, refine, and execute their TAGs. This support may include:

- **Dedicated Mentoring:** Each TAG project will be assigned a support team to offer guidance on strategic planning, policy integration, and stakeholder engagement.
- **Helpdesk, Regular Check-Ins & Visits:** access to an email/portal helpdesk, regular mentoring webinars/calls and meetings or visits to track progress.
- **Planning Tools:** structured design templates, guidelines, and frameworks to develop the required outputs, as well as online support for agenda development.
- **"Policy Integration Clinics":** Specialised sessions will guide TAG teams on governance frameworks, EU and national environmental regulations, public financing pathways, and drafting Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs).
- **Adaptive Roadmap Guidance & KPI Feedback:** Expert feedback on Key Performance Indicator (KPI) progress snapshots to ensure alignment with EU Mission Ocean 2030 goals, alongside mid-course roadmap adjustments.
- **Peer Learning & Synergy Sessions:** Knowledge-exchange huddles via the digital collaboration platform to share solutions for common regional challenges, co-financing, and decarbonization strategies.

5. APPLICATION PREPARATION & SUBMISSION

5.1 STEP 1: Read Open Call Documentation

The Open Call documentation can be found on the [SoS2LearnDBS website](#). Applicants must carefully read all the Open Call documents (Figure 1) and follow all the guidelines when preparing their proposals for the **SoS2LearnDBS 1st Tag Open Call**. Failure to adhere to these instructions may result in ineligibility.

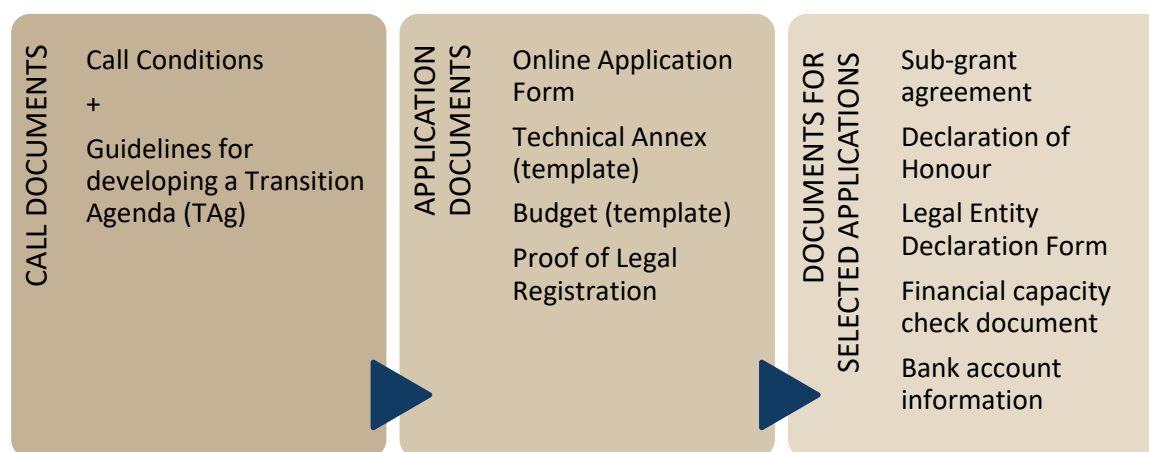


Figure 1 – Overview of the 1st Tag Open Call documents.

Please read and download all relevant files before proceeding with the submission.

5.2 STEP 2: Prepare your application

The application is composed of the following items:

- Online Application form: [Register here](#) and complete the [online application form](#). **After registering on the application platform, applicants will receive a confirmation email. Applicants who do not receive this email should check their spam or junk mail folder.**
- Technical Annex: according to the Technical Annex template.
- Budget: according to the Budget template.
- Proof of Legal Registration of consortium partner with an established link to the target region/community (no template provided): document showing the date and place of establishment, legal status, and the purpose/mission/objectives of at least one organisation consortium with an established link to the target region/community. If the document is originally not in English, please provide an official translation to English¹³.

Applicants must provide all these items. You can save your online application form and work on it before submission.

¹³ No template is provided for this document. Accepted documents may include, but are not limited to: certificates of incorporation/registration, extracts from official business or association registers, statutes/articles of association, or other equivalent documents issued by a competent authority showing the organisation's legal establishment and purpose.

5.3 STEP 3: Submit your Proposal

Submissions must be made exclusively by submitting the **Online application form** available in the official [Open Calls platform](#) with the **Technical Annex** (according to template), the **Budget** (according to template), and the **Proof of Legal Registration** uploaded/attached to the online form. Incomplete applications or applications submitted through another channel will not be accepted.

The deadline for submission of proposals is **11 December 2026, 17h00 CET**.

Please note the following rules when preparing and submitting your proposal:

- Multiple proposals are allowed, but only one project can be awarded per beneficiary.
- Applicants can edit their proposal until the call closure. In case you cannot edit your application due to a technical constraint, please contact the **SoS2LearnDBS** team at sosdb@inova.business.
- If the applicant discovers an error in the proposal, and if the call deadline has not passed, the applicant may submit another application. If more than one application is submitted, the last application submitted before the deadline will be the one to be considered for evaluation.
- No updates will be allowed after the call closure.
- We highly recommend avoiding updates in the last 48 hours of the call submission, as the system might not work properly due to the number of users. **SoS2LearnDBS** Team does not take responsibility in case you cannot submit your application in due time.
- Once the proposal is submitted, you will receive a confirmation e-mail. If you do not receive this confirmation e-mail, it means your proposal has **NOT been submitted**. If you believe this is due to a fault in the submission system, you should immediately file a complaint, explain the circumstances and attaching a copy of the proposal (and, if possible, screenshots to show what happened).
- The failure to submit a proposal on time, for any reason, including network communications delays or working from multiple browsers or multiple browser windows, is not acceptable as an extenuating circumstance. The time of receipt of the application as recorded by the submission system will be definitive.

5.4 Additional information & clarification

Queries about the TAg call can be sent to sosdb@inova.business before 6th December 2026. We cannot guarantee that emails will be answered after this date.

All the relevant information about the **SoS2LearnDBS** call will be provided via the project website: <https://SoS2LearnDBS.eu/>

A FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) section will be available on the **SoS2LearnDBS** project website and updated regularly.

The SoS2Learn consortium will organise information sessions (online and face-to-face) to present the TAg call and clarify questions from potential applicants.

SoS2LearnDBS support team: sosdb@inova.business .

6. EVALUATION AND SELECTION

Proposals will be evaluated in a **four-step process**, as presented in the following subsections.

6.1 Step 1: Eligibility verification

An initial eligibility verification will be done to filter out and discard non-eligible proposals. Proposals **must meet ALL the eligibility criteria**, as described in section 2.

Proposals marked as non-eligible (for not meeting one or more of the eligibility criteria) will receive a rejection letter with a justification. **No additional feedback on the process will be given.**

6.2 Step 2: Individual Evaluator Assessment

Applications meeting the eligibility criteria will move on to the individual evaluation phase. During this step, evaluation will be performed by two reviewers: one from SoS2LearnDBS consortium partners and one external expert recruited by partners. At least one evaluator will, wherever possible, be selected from a **region different from that of the applicant consortium leader**, ensuring geographical balance and impartiality.

Eligible applications will be evaluated according to the criteria presented in Table 3.

Table 3 - SoS2LearnDBS 1st TAg Open Call evaluation criteria

Evaluation Criterion (EvC)	Description
EvC1 Comprehensive planning	• Demonstrates an integrated, cross-sectoral approach aligned with at least one EU Mission Ocean objective (O1–O3) and at least one Danube–Black Sea regional priority pillar. • Presents a well-structured, actionable, and forward-looking strategic roadmap concept with clear co-design pathways that maximise long-term impact and scalability
EvC2 Feasibility	• Demonstrates necessary technical expertise, operational capacity, and management experience. Evidenced through - qualified key staff profiles, - organisational track records over the last 3 years, - demonstrated operational link between at least one partner and the targeted local community
EvC3 Commitment to implementation	• Provides realistic objectives, work plan, timeline, and resource allocation. • Includes mandatory deliverables. • Demonstrates consortium complementarity and risk mitigation. • Budget Justification: The requested grant tier (€25k–€50k, €50k–€75k, or €75k–€100k) is proportional to the project scale, complies with budget rules (max €60,000 per individual entity for Tiers 2/3; subcontracting ≤ 30%),
EvC4 Advanced state of the art	• Proposes innovative governance models, policy adaptation mechanisms, and regulatory solutions beyond current practice. • Addresses local/regional water challenges, combining social, governance, and nature-based innovation to contribute to Mission Ocean targets.

EvC5 Dissemination, communication and exploitation	• Presents a clear communication strategy with diverse channels and target audience mapping. • Includes a policy advocacy strategy to present the final roadmap to decision-makers and details concrete pathways to secure follow-up co-financing post-grant.
EvC6 Social innovation and societal impact	• Addresses social needs, water literacy, public engagement, and ethics. • Actively involves local communities, ensuring gender balance, youth involvement, and inclusion of vulnerable groups. • Integrates local and Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) with scientific methods under free, prior, and informed consent safeguards.
EvC7 Commitment to a Climate Pact Pledge	• Defines specific, measurable climate resilience actions and targets with transparent tracking. • Includes a clear commitment to formally endorse the EU Mission "Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030" Charter
EvC8 Quality of the proposed outcomes	• Defines clear, credible, and measurable outcomes. • Defines KPIs in the 4 mandatory KPI categories in Section 2.1: (i) <i>Common/Long-Term Impact KPI</i>, (ii) <i>Regional Impact KPI</i>, (iii) <i>Governance/Roadmap Delivery KPI</i>, and (iv) <i>Performance KPI</i>
EvC9 Sustainability and scaling potential	• Outlines a credible strategy for sustaining results beyond the grant • Demonstrates clear institutional adoption pathways (e.g., formal endorsement or adoption by municipal/regional councils or river basin authorities) and cross-regional replicability across the Danube–Black Sea basin.

For each criterion, a score will be attributed according to the rationale presented in Table 4.

Table 4 - SoS2LearnDBS 1st TAG Open Call scoring rationale

Score	Rationale
0 – FAIL	The proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information.
1 – POOR	The criterion is inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.
2 – FAIR	The proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses.
3 – GOOD	The proposal addresses the criterion well, but a number of shortcomings are present.
4 – VERY GOOD	The proposal addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present.
5 – EXCELLENT	The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.

The threshold for each criterion is three (3.0) out of five (5.0) possible points. Half points are not given. This indicates that if a proposal scores less than 3.0 in any criterion, the proposal is automatically rejected.

Each evaluator will record his/her individual assessment of each proposal using an online Individual Evaluation Report.

6.3 Step 3: Ranking of proposals

At the end of the evaluation process, the final score for each proposal will be calculated as follows:

- Each evaluator scores all criteria independently.
- The score for each criterion is the **average** of the scores given by all evaluators.
 - For the purpose of ranking, the criterion *Comprehensive planning* (EvC1) will be assigned a **weight of 1.5**. All other criteria keep a weight of 1.0.
- The **final ranking score** of a proposal is the **weighted sum** of all criterion scores.

Each criterion has an individual threshold of **three (3)**. Any proposal receiving a score below 3 in **any** criterion will be automatically rejected. Only proposals meeting all thresholds will advance.

Proposals that pass the thresholds are ranked according to their **final weighted score** and organised into ranking lists according to the planned distribution by region and by funding tier (Table 5).

Table 5 - SoS2LearnDBS 1st TAG Open Call minimal proposals selected by region and funding tier.

Funding tier	Upper Danube	Middle Danube	Lower Danube	Danube Delta	Black Sea
1. €25,000-€50,000	1 to 3 projects of any tier	1 to 3 projects of any tier	1 to 3 projects of any tier	1 to 3 projects of any tier	1 to 3 projects of any tier
2. €50,000-€75,000					
3. €75,000-€100,000					

Note: SO2LearnDBS reserves the right to decide differently on this distribution based on the quality of the proposals received.

In case of a tie in the final weighted score, the following rules will apply:

- **Rule 1:** If there are proposals in the same position, priority will be given to proposals that have the highest score on **EvC1. Comprehensive planning**.
- **Rule 2:** After applying Rule 1, if there are proposals in the same position, priority will be given to proposals that have the highest score on **EvC2. Feasibility**.
- **Rule 3:** After applying Rule 2, and if there are proposals in the same position, priority will be given to proposals that have the highest score on **EvC5. Dissemination, communication and exploitation**.
- **Rule 4:** After applying Rule 3 and if there are proposals in the same position, priority will be given to proposals submitted by an **International consortium**.
- **Rule 5:** After applying Rule 4 and if there are proposals in the same position, priority will be given to proposals including **women in key roles over those without women** (e.g., coordination or equivalent decision-making positions) over those without women.

6.4 Step 4: Consensus meeting and proposals selection

The consortium evaluators will then hold a consensus meeting to validate and formally approve the results obtained during the Independent Evaluation and ranking phases. The decision on the selected applicants shall be sought by consensus, and whenever not feasible, by a majority vote of 2/3. As a result of this meeting, two lists will be produced:

- Selected Projects List: the projects recommended for funding;
- Reserve list: identification of the applications to be selected for funding, if any of those listed is unable to proceed to implementation.

All proposals will receive an acceptance or rejection letter together with an anonymised version of the proposal's Evaluation Summary Report. All applicants will be notified via email of the results of the evaluation process by 31st March 2027 (indicative date). The results will then be published on the website and information channels of the **SoS2LearnDBS** project.

6.5 Redress process

Within three (3) working days of receiving (1) a Rejection Letter informing the proposal is non-eligible or (2) an Evaluation Summary Report ranking the proposal below the selection borderline, an applicant may submit a request for redress if they believe the results of the eligibility checks have not been correctly applied, or if they feel that there has been a shortcoming in the way their proposal has been evaluated that may affect the final decision on whether to enter the funding program.

In such a case, an internal review committee from **SoS2LearnDBS** will examine the applicant's request for redress. The committee's role is to ensure a coherent interpretation of such requests and equal treatment of applicants. Requests for redress must:

- Be related to the evaluation process or eligibility checks.
- Clearly describe the complaint.
- Be received within the time limit (three (3) working days) from the receipt of (1) a Rejection Letter considering the proposal as non-eligible or (2) the Evaluation Summary Report.
- Sent by the entity's legal representative who has also submitted the proposal.

The committee will review the complaint and will recommend an appropriate course of action. If there is clear evidence of a shortcoming that could affect the eventual funding decision, it is possible that all or part of the proposal will be re-evaluated. Please note:

- This procedure is concerned only with the general evaluation and/or eligibility checking process. The committee will not question the scientific or technical judgement of the evaluators.
- A re-evaluation will only be carried out if there is evidence of a shortcoming that affects the final decision on whether to fund the proposal or not. This means, for example, that a problem relating to one evaluation criterion will not lead to a re-evaluation if a proposal has failed anyway on other criteria.
- The evaluation score following any re-evaluation will be regarded as definitive. It may be lower than the original score.

All requests for redress will be treated in confidence and must be sent to the **SoS2LearnDBS** team at sosdb@inova.business.

In the case where a proposal under the redress process is re-evaluated, and the new evaluation score is higher, it will be compared with the proposal that has entered the funding programme with the lowest ranking. The comparison will use the ranking rules as detailed in section 6.2.

6.6 Signature of Sub-Grant Agreement

After the evaluation and selection phase is concluded, the **SoS2LearnDBS** consortium will start the Sub-Grant Agreement (SGA) preparation phase in collaboration with the representatives of the projects that have been awarded. The objective of the SGA preparation is to fulfil the legal requirements between the **SoS2LearnDBS** consortium and each beneficiary of the Open Call.

The selection and formalisation of KPIs for each funded TAG project are carried out during SGA preparation, in alignment with the approved Application Form, the Plan of Activities, the Open Call Conditions and the “Guidelines for developing a Transition Agenda”. The KPIs incorporated into the SGA constitute measurable implementation commitments and form part of the contractual obligations of the beneficiary.

*Selected projects should be flexible enough to accommodate some adjustments that may be requested by the **SoS2LearnDBS** before and during the grant agreement signature to ensure alignment with **SoS2LearnDBS** Project goals and the Mission's latest developments.*

The request for the documentation by the **SoS2LearnDBS** team will be sent to the beneficiary, including deadlines by which information and documentation should be sent. Documentation requested includes:

- Proof of legal existence: Organisation (s)/Company(ies) register, official journal or other official document per country showing the name of the organisation(s), the legal address and registration number and a copy of a document proving VAT registration (in case the VAT number does not show on the registration extract or its equivalent).
- Declaration of Honour according to the template provided by SoS2LearnDBS.
- Financial capacity check documents (for example, profit and loss account and balance sheet of the last 2 years, business plan, audit report produced by an approved external auditor, etc). The check will normally be done for all beneficiaries, except: Public bodies or international organizations, or if the individual requested grant amount is lower than 60.000€.
- Bank Account & Legal Entity Declaration Form, available at:
https://commission.europa.eu/publications/business-partners-legal-entities-and-bank-accounts_en

Specific to SMEs | Proof of the SME condition is required:

- If the applicant has been fully validated as an SME on the Beneficiary Register of the EC Participant Portal, the PIC number must be provided.
- If the applicant has not been fully validated as an SME on the EC Participant Portal, the following documents will be required to prove the status as an SME:

- SME declaration signed and stamped: If the beneficiary declares to be non-autonomous, the balance sheet and profit and loss account (with annexes) for the last period for upstream and downstream organisations are required.
- Status Information Form, which includes the headcount (AWU), balance sheet, profit & loss accounts of the latest closed financial year and the relation, upstream and downstream, of any linked or partner company.

In general, the SGA preparation should be concluded within four (4) weeks. Additional time may be provided by the **SoS2LearnDBS** Project Coordinator in case of a relevant reason. In case the beneficiary does not send the requested documents within the above period, the proposal is automatically rejected, and the next proposal in the reserve list is invited to initiate the contract preparation.

The SGA will be signed between the **SoS2LearnDBS** consortium represented by its coordinator (INOVA) and by all Consortium beneficiaries of each proposal.

Origin of the funds

The funds attached to the Sub-Grant Agreement come directly from the funds of the European project **SoS2LearnDBS** and therefore remain the property of the EU until payment of the balance, whose management rights have been transferred to the project partners in **SoS2LearnDBS** via European Commission GA no. 101217667.

As detailed in “Annex: Sub-grant Agreement template”, this relationship between the subgrantees and the European Commission (EC) through the **SoS2LearnDBS** project carries a set of obligations to the subgrantees with the EC. It is the task of the sub-grantees to achieve them and of the **SoS2LearnDBS** consortium partners to inform them about them.

7. OTHER RESPONSIBILITIES OF BENEFICIARIES

The selected TAg Applicants are indirect beneficiaries of EC funding. Therefore, they must comply with obligations under Horizon Europe-specific requirements as set out in the Sub-Grant Agreement (SGA):

Data protection

The reply to any call for proposals involves the recording and processing of personal data (such as name, email, and address). Such data will be processed pursuant to Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR) and Regulation (EU) 2018/1725. Unless indicated otherwise, personal data requested to evaluate the application will be processed solely for that purpose by the consortium. Beneficiaries must process personal data lawfully and transparently, ensuring informed consent and appropriate technical safeguards.

Confidentiality and Security

During the implementation of the project and for four years after the end of the collaboration (or as specified in the Sub-Grant Agreement), the parties must keep confidential any data, documents, or other material identified as confidential ('confidential information'). Confidential information may only be disclosed to personnel or reviewers bound by specific Non-Disclosure Agreements.

Ethics, Fundamental Values and Traditional Knowledge

All funded activities must be carried out in compliance with the highest ethical standards, applicable EU, international, and national laws, and basic EU values. Beneficiaries must ensure that:

- Participation in all activities (surveys, workshops, stakeholder consultations) is voluntary, supported by written **informed consent**, with the right to withdraw at any time without consequence.
- Activities involving children, minors, or vulnerable groups adhere to strict safeguarding procedures and legal guardian consent.
- Activities in **non-EU countries** maintain full consistency with EU ethics and GDPR data protection standards.
- Documentation of **Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)** or local community heritage takes place strictly under **Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC)**, ensuring the protection of intellectual property and cultural heritage rights.
- Activities respect environmental protection standards and comply with the **Do No Significant Harm (DNSH)** principle.

Compliance with Horizon Europe Contractual Obligations

Selected beneficiaries must agree to comply with the contractual obligations outlined in the Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement, specifically Articles 12 (Conflict of Interest), 13 (Confidentiality), 14 (Ethics), 17.2 (Visibility & EU Flag display), 18 (Specific Rules), 19 (Information), 20 (Record-Keeping for at least 3–5 years), and 25 (Audits and Controls by EC, OLAF, and Court of Auditors).

Partners





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