Intercluster cSBO call 2027

Introduction

This document contains all relevant information for the 2027 intercluster strategic basic research for clusters (cSBO) call. This call is a close collaboration between the seven Flemish spearhead clusters: Biovia, Catalisti, De Blauwe Cluster, ENT.A, Flanders' FOOD, Flux50 and VIL. This call aims to initiate intercluster cSBO projects that offer significant added value to the relevant spearhead clusters and their (company) members. These projects are constituent parts of the innovation strategy within the spearhead clusters i.e. not 'stand-alone' initiatives. They must be driven by demand from industry and/or present opportunities for research centres, and address the needs identified and endorsed by the target companies (from the relevant clusters). The intended knowledge development will take the cluster roadmaps a step further, and is both urgent and important. The knowledge developed will contribute to the achievement of the strategic objectives of the relevant clusters and their target groups.

Eligibility of applicants

cSBO concerns the conduct of independent (non-directed) strategic basic research by research and knowledge dissemination organisations in accordance with the provisions of the EU R&D&I Framework Regulation. Only organisations that meet the criteria for a research and knowledge dissemination organisation, as set out in the European regulations on state aid for research, development and innovation, are allowed to participate. As a minimum, and in accordance with the SBO-decree, a cSBO project proposal must be submitted (i) by at least two research groups from a University or (ii) by other Flemish research centres, such as strategic research centres (SOC's), with the involvement of at least one other knowledge institute. For more detailed information, applicants may refer to section "Pre-proposal template and cSBO manual".

Basic principles and requirements

Via this new call process, 'first-come, first-served' situations are avoided. For the year 2027 a maximum of 2 intercluster cSBO applications will be selected for full proposal development and project submission at the funding agency (VLAIO). Before applicants submit their pre-proposal application, the basic principles and requirements listed here below apply:

- As a guiding reference, at least three spearhead clusters must be involved in the pre-proposal application. Each spearhead cluster involved in a proposal must first be contacted by the applicants to gauge how the project proposal might align with the strategy and the actual needs of the spearhead cluster. This step is mandatory and explicit mention of the relevant contact person for each spearhead cluster is required (as indicated in the pre-proposal template).
- Argumentation on why strategic basic research is necessary and how this research can later translate into more applied research. This also includes argumentation why other project instruments such as ICON and COOCK+ are not viable options for the research

topic under consideration. This reasoning must be included in the pre-proposal application.

- The project is clearly demand-driven by the industry and linked to the participating spearhead clusters. In the pre-proposal phase formal signed company LOI's are not yet required. However it is important to include in the pre-proposal a list of potential companies for the Industrial Advisory Board accompanied by a brief justification. Another possibility at this stage is that companies express their interest via email which can then also be mentioned in the pre-proposal. Please note that if your pre-proposal is selected, then for the submission of the full proposal there must be at least three companies in the industrial advisory board (IAB) per participating spearhead cluster. At that stage the LOI's should be secured in consultation with the spearhead clusters.
- Clear description of how the icSBO proposal fits with and is linked to the spearhead clusters' roadmaps and projects with a clear differentiating and complementary factor to the latter.
- Given the spearhead clusters' objective to deliver innovations within a relatively short timeframe across a broad group of companies, preference is given to short-term and smaller-scale projects (preferably limited to 2-3 years).

Research themes

For the 2027 call, the research theme of the submitted pre-proposal should align with the involved spearhead clusters' roadmaps and innovation trajectories. The roadmaps and/or innovation trajectories listed below are intended to serve as inspiration for submitting an inter-cluster cSBO project involving at least three spearhead clusters. The links to the individual spearhead cluster roadmaps and/or innovation trajectories can be found below:

- Biovia: Our Strategic Roadmaps
- Catalisti: Our approach to innovation | Catalisti
- De Blauwe Cluster: Innovation roadmaps | Blue Cluster
- ENT.A:https://www.entertainmentassociatie.be/s/ENTA-Strategische-Roadmaps.pdf

- Flanders' FOOD: Flanders' FOOD - Spearhead cluster for the agri-food industry
- Flux50: https://flux50.com/innovation-support/wat-zijn-de-focusgroepen
- VIL: Thema's - VIL

Timing

An indicative timeline of the 2027 call procedure can be consulted here below:

Phase	Timing
Launch call	16th of September 2026
Submission deadline pre-proposal	20th of November 2026
Pre-proposal selection	December 2026
Communication of pre-proposal selection	18th of December 2026
Start full proposal writing	January 2027

Submission full proposal	31st of May 2027
Evaluation and funding decision by VLAIO	Q4 2027

Submission deadline pre-proposal

Applicants must submit their pre-proposal using the provided template before 23h59 on the 20th of November 2026 via all dedicated contact persons of the involved clusters. Pre-proposals submitted after the deadline are not eligible.

Evaluation criteria

The pre-proposal applications will be evaluated by the spearhead clusters based on the criteria listed in the matrix here below. The spearhead clusters will make the final decision regarding the selection of the 2 applications retained for elaboration to full proposals.

	Critical	**Insufficient**	**Good**	**Excellent**
Score	**1**	**3**	**5**	**7**
Criterion impact/valorisation: Does the project address a current need among businesses in our target group?	Insufficient commercial interest in the project	(A score of 'insufficient' cannot be awarded: insufficient business interest implies a critical score for this criterion)	Project is supported by at least three companies per spearhead cluster	This project is supported by more than three companies per spearhead cluster
Criterion impact/valorisation: How broad is the target audience for our cluster? (Apart from companies that are already interested, as mentioned in the first question)	< 5 Flemish companies can actively acquire knowledge or draw inspiration	5 <= x <= 20 Flemish companies can actively acquire knowledge or draw inspiration or the knowledge is directed at just one sub-sector	> 20 Flemish companies can actively acquire knowledge or draw inspiration or the knowledge is aimed at several sub-sectors	> 25 Flemish companies can actively acquire knowledge or draw inspiration or the knowledge is aimed at the entire sector and all its stakeholders
Criterion Cluster: Does the project address the challenges set out in the roadmaps/strategic priorities for our cluster? Alignment with roadmap(s).	The project does not fit into any of the roadmaps	The project fits marginally within the scope of a roadmap or the project is not innovative enough	The project aligns with at least one concept in a roadmap	The project fills a gap or aligns with several concepts from one or more roadmaps

Criterion Cluster: Is basic research carried out in a timely manner and is it necessary to enable industrial developments?	No	Possibly	Yes, there are currently significant barriers that need to be overcome through knowledge development	Absolutely, as in a 'good' score, but the knowledge is also genuinely urgent to enable industrial development
Criterion impact/valorisation The project plays an important role as a catalyst for knowledge and forms part of a process aimed at moving from research to commercialisation and implementation.	No potential	Unclear potential	Potential, part of the project involving uncertainty (there are already possible avenues for follow-up)	Part of the project, will lead to several other projects with a higher TRL

Contact and support

For questions and support, applicants can directly contact the intercluster representative of the relevant spearhead clusters:

- Biovia: Gudrun Antoons (gudrun.antoons@biovia.be)
- Catalisti: Laurie Braeckmans (lbraeckmans@catalisti.be)
- De Blauwe Cluster: Stefaan Mensaert (stefaan.mensaert@blauwecluster.be)
- ENT.A: Dries De Roeck (dries.deroeck@entertainmentassociatie.be)
- Flanders' FOOD: Marie Demarcke (Marie.Demarcke@flandersfood.com)
- Flux50: Guy Vekemans (guy.vekemans@flux50.com)
- VIL: Erik Vandervreken (Erik.Vandervreken@vil.be)

Pre-proposal template and cSBO manual

On the following page, applicants can find the 2027 pre-proposal template. Pre-proposals which do not meet all requirements stipulated above and those formulated in the template below will be considered not eligible. For further information on the cSBO project instrument and its modalities, applicants can use the manual for strategic basic research projects available on the VLAIO website.

Project Title

Max. 4 pages
Submission deadline: November 20th 2026

1. Budget estimate, duration, cluster involvement

Budget estimation		EUR million
Duration		years
Clusters involved	☐ BIOVIA (contact person:) ☐ Catalisti (contact person:) ☐ De Blauwe Cluster (contact person:) ☐ ENT.A (contact person:) ☐ Flanders' Food (contact person:) ☐ Flux50 (contact person:) ☐ VIL (contact person:)	

2. Project idea: background, goals, consortium, plan

Background & importance for target stakeholder group
XX

Innovation objective
XX

Scientific goals
XX

Critical elements and constraints
XX

State of the art
XX

Partners & expertise

Name KI	***Describe per knowledge institute, the expertise in the project and added value to the project***
KI 1	*XX*
KI 2	*XX*
KI 3	*XX*

Approach
XX

Tasks & deliverables
XX

3. Fit with cluster roadmaps
XX

4. Strategic importance for industry in Flanders