SME Access Pilot

Applicant Guidelines

What is on offer?

The EVOLVE project (Grant Agreement: 101130986) aims to strengthen Euro-BioImaging's operation, administration, capacities for strategic partnering and capacity to facilitate innovation and excellent science. Through the project, we are seeking to further facilitate the access of companies, in particular start-ups and small-and-medium-enterprises (SMEs) to cutting-edge imaging instruments, technical experts and image data services.

We are launching an SME Access Pilot to demonstrate relevance of imaging technologies and image data services, methods and tools via Euro-BioImaging for industrial research and encourage new private sector users to access biological and biomedical imaging services at our research infrastructure.

Funding amount: **up to EUR 4.000,-**

No. of projects to be funded: **5**

The small-scale funding available for this call will cover facility access costs at full-cost rates for the purpose of assessing the readiness of the service, carrying out small pilot experiments and/or collecting additional data for the companies' R&D pipeline.

Co-funding of projects with own resources of the applicant is possible in cases where the estimated costs for the pilot project exceed EUR 4.000,- or a company wishes to expand the scope. In case of co-funding, information should be provided in the budget section of the proposal to allow reviewers to assess the feasibility of the proposal, and applicants must confirm availability of co-funding before project start if the application is successful.

Who is eligible?

Companies in European Union member states and Horizon Europe associated countries[1] that wish to access Euro-BioImaging services and that are classified as micro-, small- or medium-sized according to the definitions by the European Commission[2]:

[1] https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/guidance/list-3rd-country-participation_horizon-euratom_en.pdf

[2] https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/smes/sme-fundamentals/sme-definition_en

Co-funded by the European Union

The main factors determining whether an enterprise is an SME are

1. staff headcount
2. either turnover or balance sheet total

Category	Micro	Small	Medium-sized
Staff	< 10	< 50	< 250
Turnover	≤ €2 million	≤ €10 million	≤ €50 million
OR			
Balance Sheet	≤ €2 million	≤ €10 million	≤ €43 million

For companies that are part of a larger group, ceilings apply to the whole group.

What type of projects are eligible?

The SME Access Pilot funds physical or remote access to any of the Euro-BioImaging services in biological and biomedical imaging (including image analysis services), with the purpose of encouraging access to research infrastructure by private companies and demonstrating the impact on their research, development and innovation (RDI) activities.

Access includes access to cutting-edge imaging instruments, skilled operators, technical expertise, technical consultancy, training and/or image data analysis services. Depending on the request, the format of service provision might range from physical access for project implementation by company staff under training and guidance by Euro-BioImaging technical experts, to remote access or full service provision.

Applications in one or more of the following categories would be in scope:

- Assessment of readiness of provided services for the intended use case
- Technological or biological proof-of-concept
- Feasibility study
- Data generation (including for fundraising or marketing)
- Image data analysis and tools development
- Validation of a new method or tool
- Prototype testing (non-commercial)
- Consultation or training by experts

Projects involving the prospective recruitment of human subjects / clinical trials are out of scope. Other projects with regulatory or ethical restrictions such as preclinical imaging can be funded given that relevant permissions are already available or can be obtained within the timelines of the project. Please discuss the feasibility with the service provider.

Projects must be **completed by latest 30 June 2027**. Work can start immediately after the funding decision has been communicated according to the schedule agreed with the service provider. Companies can access a service once or multiple times during the project duration depending on project needs. For pilot projects utilizing co-funding or budget top-up from the applicant, activities covered by applicants own funding can continue past the deadline.

Application process

1. Define your imaging needs

Identify the imaging challenge or service your project requires. If you already know which technology or provider you need, you can proceed directly. If not, Euro-BioImaging can help you identify the most suitable service and facility.

2. Contact Euro-BioImaging early

Contact the Access Manager with a brief description of your project, your imaging needs, and your preferred service provider (if known). A consultation with a technical expert will help determine the most appropriate imaging approach. Initial contact should be made by latest **Friday, 16 October 2026**, although consultations can continue until the application deadline.

You will also find all services on the **Euro-BioImaging website**. Please select a technology to see the list of service providers ("Nodes") that are offering this service[3].

3. Discuss project feasibility

Meet with the selected service provider to review your project. Following this consultation, the provider will assess technical feasibility, prepare a cost estimate, and submit a **Feasibility Check Confirmation** directly to Euro-BioImaging.

4. Prepare your application

Complete the **SME Access Pilot Application Form**, including:

- Part A: Project description, requested services, and expected impact.
- Part B: Project plan, costs, and technical information (completed with input from the service provider).
- Part C: Eligibility and consent questionnaire.

5. Submit your application

[3] Please note that service providers in Hungary are currently excluded from the SME Access Pilot pursuant to Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/2506, adopted under Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2020/2092, according to which Hungarian institutions are currently ineligible to receive funding from the European Union. Consequently, EVOLVE project funds cannot be used to pay research costs or facility access fees at affected institutions.

Submit the completed application as a single PDF **by email** no later than **Friday 13 November 2026, 5:00 pm CET.** Only one application per company will be considered. You may however update your application until the deadline by resubmission; if multiple versions are submitted, only the latest version will be reviewed.

Your chosen service provider needs to submit a **Feasibility Check Confirmation** directly to Euro-BioImaging to confirm that the service can be delivered based on the information provided by you.

6. Await the evaluation outcome

Applications are reviewed after the submission deadline. You will be notified of the outcome by email by **11 December 2026**.

7. Start your imaging project

If your application is successful, the approved imaging services will be delivered by the selected Euro-BioImaging facility. Funding is provided by covering eligible access and service costs directly to the facility rather than through a cash grant.

Timelines

	Deadline
Consultation with technical experts to assess feasibility	**16 October 2026**
Submission of application	**13 November 2026**
Evaluation results	**11 December 2026**
Earliest project start date	**01 January 2027**
Project completed	**30 June 2027**
Report submitted	**31 July 2027**

Assessment criteria

Proposals will be scored against the following four criteria:

1. Need for facility access: Is access to the requested imaging service justified and appropriate for the proposed project?
2. Feasibility: Is the proposed project plan realistic, the methodology suitable and the project feasible within the available time and resources?
3. Innovation impact: Will the pilot generate meaningful technical value and innovation impact for the applicant company?

4. Sustainability: Is the expected outcome likely to encourage future uptake of advanced imaging services and/or longer-term collaboration?

Each criterium will be scored according to the following scale

- 5 – Excellent: Fully meets the criterion; no significant weaknesses.
- 4 – Good: Meets the criterion with only minor weaknesses.
- 3 – Average: Adequately meets the criterion but has some weaknesses.
- 2 – Satisfactory: Partially meets the criterion; significant weaknesses.
- 1 – Poor: Serious deficiencies.
- 0 – Ineligible/Not competitive.

New users that have never used a Euro-BioImaging facility before will receive a bonus score of +3. Individual scores will be added to a total score (Minimum: 0; Maximum: 23).

Proposals will be ranked according to total score and the highest 5 will be selected for funding. In case of proposals scored equally, priority will be given first to new users, then to applicants that contribute with their own funding to exceeding the EUR 4.000,- funding cap or longer collaborations.

Terms and conditions

Successful applicants will have to **finish their projects by 30 June 2027**. For pilot projects utilizing co-funding or budget top-up from the applicant, activities covered by the applicant's own funding can continue past the deadline.

Grantees will have to answer a short survey and provide a short, non-confidential report on the outcomes of the project for the purpose of pilot evaluation within one month of service access, but no later than 31 July 2027. A template for the report can be found **here**.

FAQ

For further questions regarding the SME Access Pilot and the application process, check our **FAQ** or contact us directly at **innovate@eurobioimaging.eu**.

SME Access Pilot

Application form

(with instructions)

PART A

Administrative information

1. Legal name of company:
2. Official address (street, city, country) and company website:
3. Name and address of department in which the research supported by the service is to be carried out (if different from above):
4. Company main business focus:

☐ Pharma
☐ Biotech
☐ MedTech
☐ Digital & AI
☐ Consumer Care
☐ Consumer Health/Cosmetics
☐ Agrifood
☐ Advanced materials
☐ Research services /CRO
☐ Other: _____

5. Company main research activity - *max 500 characters*

Briefly describe the type of R&D your company is performing such as research, product development, manufacturing, contract research, … and main focus (e.g. drug development, cell or gene therapy, diagnostics, industrial biotech, agri-tech…). Do not include sensitive information.

6. Contact person for this application (name, email):

This can be an administrative or research contact. The person named here will be notified of the outcome of the application.

7. Researcher(s) responsible for the pilot project if different from above (name, email):

Please list here the researcher responsible for the project or an expert that can provide additional technical information about the planned project if required.

Project and service description

1. Project title: *Please do not change the title if you are submitting an updated version of your application.*
2. What is the technical or scientific challenge that you are currently trying to solve? - *max 1,500 characters*

Provide details about the stage of your development and which question you need to solve making use of imaging or image data service to move ahead.

3. What instrument / expertise / tools / resources is your company currently lacking? - *max 1,000 characters*

Briefly explain your need for imaging services from Euro-BioImaging and why you cannot perform the work in-house.

4. Brief description of the project and proposed work to be conducted at the Euro-BioImaging facility - *max 2,500 characters*

Briefly describe your project, including information on numbers and availability of samples, preliminary data, planned analysis method etc. The project description will be shared with the reviewers of the proposal and the selected service provider and needs to be sufficiently detailed to confirm feasibility and provide an estimated budget. Reviewers and service providers are bound to confidentiality through agreements with Euro-BioImaging.

5. Indicate the required technology services. You can find an overview over all Euro-BioImaging services here.

List the names of the technologies and/or instruments or data service that you wish to access.

6. List of additional resources that may be required at the facility (select multiple if needed).

Select all the complementary services that you require for your imaging project from the list below.

☐ Instruments
☐ Technical assistance to run the project
☐ Methodological setup
☐ Training in infrastructure use
☐ Probe preparation
☐ Animal preparation
☐ Animal facilities
☐ Wet lab space
☐ Server Space
☐ Data processing and analysis
☐ Training workstations
☐ Training seminar room
☐ Housing facilities
☐ Clinical trial insurance contracting
☐ Pharmacovigilance
☐ Regulatory affairs management service
☐ Biobanking, biological material storage and processing
☐ Cell culture facilities – Safety level 1
☐ Cell culture facilities – Safety level 2

Project impact

7. What is the current Technology Readiness Level (TRL)[4] and what is the expected TRL after the pilot?

Project start

- ☐ TRL 3 - Experimental proof of concept
- ☐ TRL 4 - Technology validated in lab
- ☐ TRL 5 - Technology validated in relevant environment
- ☐ TRL 6 - Technology demonstrated in relevant environment
- ☐ TRL 7 - System prototype demonstration in operational environment
- ☐ TRL 8 - System complete and qualified
- ☐ TRL 9 - Actual system proven in operational environment

Project end

- ☐ TRL 3 - Experimental proof of concept
- ☐ TRL 4 - Technology validated in lab
- ☐ TRL 5 - Technology validated in relevant environment
- ☐ TRL 6 - Technology demonstrated in relevant environment
- ☐ TRL 7 - System prototype demonstration in operational environment
- ☐ TRL 8 - System complete and qualified
- ☐ TRL 9 - Actual system proven in operational environment

8. Describe the innovation impact the participation in the pilot would have on your company – *max 1,000 charact*

Provide details on how the proposed project will allow you to advance your research, development and innovation (RDI) activities or generate data for business purposes.

9. Expected outcomes (select multiple if needed)

- ☐ Assessment of readiness of provided services for the intended use case
- ☐ Proof-of-concept
- ☐ Feasibility study
- ☐ Data generation (research)
- ☐ Data generation (marketing, fundraising or other commercial purposes)
- ☐ Data analysis
- ☐ Validation of method or tool
- ☐ Prototype testing
- ☐ Consultation or training by expert
- ☐ Building of long-term partnerships
- ☐ Other: _____

[4] https://www.emdesk.com/horizon-2020-horizon-europe-basics-guide/trl-meaning-technology-readiness-level-eu-research

PART B

Project plan and feasibility (to be completed with input from the service provider)

1. Select service provider (Euro-BioImaging Node)[5]:
2. Name of the person at the Node who you have been in contact with.
3. Project plan [6]

Please indicate the expected start and end date of your project, number and duration of facility visits (if applicable), schedule for technical training (if applicable), availability of samples, data transfer and analysis arrangements.

4. Estimated costs of the project[7]: *Please provide total costs as estimated by the service provider.*
5. For project costs exceeding EUR 4.000,-, applicants may contribute their own funding to cover those costs ("co-fund").

   ☐ Co-fund not applicable.

   ☐ Co-fund to be used for the project.

   Funding source:

   Please describe how the remaining access costs will be covered. Indicate whether additional costs will be paid as fee-for-service directly by you or financed through other grant schemes. For projects utilizing additional external grants, you must provide confirmation at the start of the project that funding to cover additional costs is available.
6. Are there biological hazards associated with the project?

   Please provide sufficient information to assess the hazard (e.g. biological or (radio-)chemical hazards).

7. Are there any ethical or regulatory requirements associated with the project?

   Please provide sufficient information to assess the requirements (e.g. ethical or regulatory permits) and list relevant permissions that are already in place, so that service providers can assess whether the project is feasible in compliance with applicable legislation and institutional policies within the timelines.

8. Is the work confidential? Are there any IP constraints associated with this project that the service provider should know about?

[5] https://www.eurobioimaging.eu/our-nodes/

[6] Applicants will be informed if their application was successful no later than 11 December 2026. Projects must be completed by 30 June 2027.

[7] We can fund up to €4.000,- for pilot projects at the Euro-BioImaging Node.

Please provide sufficient information to assess the requirements such as NDAs, data and material transfer agreements, access restrictions to experimental setup etc.

9. Training needs in using the selected technology(ies)

☐ First time user, require training to use the technology
☐ I have a working knowledge of the technology, but may require some assistance
☐ I have expertise in using the technology, and do not require any training or assistance
☐ I am requesting remote or mail-in access, and do not require any training or assistance

Depending on the chosen service, facilities might provide training and advice on e.g. sample preparation and handling or instrument operation. Participation in official advanced training courses offered by the service provider is not covered by the grant.

PART C

Communication

☐ I understand that I will have to complete a short survey and provide a short, non-confidential report on the outcomes of the project for the purpose of pilot evaluation no later than 31 July 2027. A template for the report can be found here.

☐ Optional: I would like to receive the Euro-BioImaging newsletter (4 times a year) to be informed about other opportunities.

How did you learn about this call?

☐ Social media
☐ Euro-BioImaging newsletter
☐ Communication by local Life Science Cluster or Innovation network
☐ Colleague
☐ Euro-BioImaging Node staff
☐ Another company
☐ Other: _____

Eligibility

☐ I confirm that my company is classified as an SME as defined by the European Commission[8].

1. Do you have any prior collaboration with the service-providing Node?

☐ YES ☐ NO

[8] https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/smes/sme-fundamentals/sme-definition_en

2. Has your organisation already reached the maximum amount of de minimis aid (EUR 300.000,-) during the current and previous two fiscal years[9] (only relevant for TRL 7 and above)?

   ☐ YES ☐ NO

Declarations and Consent

☐ I declare that the information contained in this proposal is correct and complete.

☐ I declare that I am authorized to submit this application and the information about the project and the business activities described therein on behalf of the company listed on the application.

☐ By submitting this application, I agree with the Terms & Conditions of the call and the processing of my personal data according to the Euro-BioImaging privacy policy.

[9] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/de-minimis-rule-exemption-of-small-amounts-of-state-aid-from-notification-from-2024.html