GOVERNMENT OF MALTA
MINISTRY FOR JUSTICE,
RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

XJENZA MALTA

CANCER
RESEARCH & INNOVATION
HUB MALTA

R&I Thematic Programmes: Cancer Research Programme 2027

Rules for Participation 2027 | Option **B**

Rules for Non-State Aid

CANCER RESEARCH PROGRAMME

THEMATIC PROGRAMMES

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1 Introduction

The R&I Thematic Programmes aim to financially support innovative projects through specific, top-down initiatives with the support of Maltese Public Entities and Authorities. These thematic initiatives are supported through national funds managed by Xjenza Malta.

The aim of these thematic initiatives is to improve the R&I landscape in Malta, by producing a cohesive system by which Maltese researchers and entrepreneurs may develop their innovative ideas in a comprehensive, well-adapted environment which caters specifically for their sector. With these requirements in mind, an adaptive system can only be developed with the collaboration of Maltese public entities, authorities and agencies who boast a deep technical understanding of specific sectors within their remit.

These collaborative initiatives will allow Maltese researchers to benefit from the synergy between the technical abilities of these Maltese Public Entities and Authorities, and the R&I experience and networking capabilities of Xjenza Malta.

The main objectives of the R&I Thematic Programmes are:

- To develop a cohesive R&I landscape in Malta
- To create dedicated, sector specific support
- To engage with the Maltese R&I community
- To concentrate the efforts of Maltese researchers and entrepreneurs into addressing topics of national interest

The R&I Thematic Programmes are aimed to address immediate concerns of national interest.

2 The Cancer Research Programme

2.1 Programme Scope and Focus

Following the proposal of the Action Plan for the Health and Well-being Smart Specialisation Strategy (RIS3) and after a succession of consultations between Xjenza Malta and the Cancer Research and Innovation Hub Malta (CRIHM), several avenues for collaboration were identified, including a dedicated thematic programme for cancer research.

The Cancer Research Programme aims to support research that might in the future help reduce the incidence of cancer, improve cancer treatment, survival, and the quality of life of cancer patients.

The Cancer Research Programme aims to support capacity-building efforts related to:

Molecular Research and Diagnostic Innovations

This priority area focuses on advancing the understanding of cancer at the molecular level to innovate diagnostic techniques. By integrating cutting-edge technologies such as genomics, proteomics, and bioinformatics, the aim is to identify novel biomarkers and develop precision diagnostic tools. This approach enables early detection and personalized treatment strategies, ultimately improving patient outcomes and streamlining clinical workflows.

Community-Based Cancer Research

Community-Based Cancer Research seeks to bridge the gap between research and real-world impact by involving local communities in the fight against cancer. This approach emphasizes the importance of community engagement, and culturally sensitive interventions. By fostering partnerships with community organizations, and patients, we aim to develop research initiatives that address local cancer burdens, improve access to care, and promote public health education.

Therapeutic Development and Clinical Strategies

This priority area is dedicated to advancing therapeutic development and refining clinical strategies to combat cancer more effectively. Through collaborative research

efforts, the focus is on discovering novel therapies, optimizing existing treatment protocols, and enhancing patient safety.

Psychosocial Support and Patient-centred Approaches

Recognizing the holistic needs of cancer patients, this priority emphasizes the importance of psychosocial support and patient-centred care. These initiatives should aim to enhance the quality of life for patients and their families by providing psychological counselling, social services, and supportive care tailored to individual

needs. By fostering compassionate communication and empowering patients through education, we aspire to create a supportive environment that addresses emotional, social, and spiritual well-being.

For projects which are commercially applicable, this programme targets either early stage or applied research, hence targeting research between TRL 1 and TRL 7.

While encouraging innovative and impactful cancer research, the following types of studies fall outside the scope of this initiative:

- **Confirmatory Studies** – Research that primarily seeks to validate existing findings without introducing new mechanistic insights or advancements.
- **Descriptive Screenings** – Studies that focus solely on the screening of molecules or phenotypes without exploring underlying mechanisms or contributing to innovative discovery.
- **Reagent Generation & Technology Optimization** – Projects centred on the development of reagents or the refinement of existing technologies without a direct application toward novel research questions or patient outcomes.
- **Routine Data Collection** – Efforts that involve the ongoing compilation of existing statistics without integrating new methodologies, analytical approaches, or translational insights.
- **Descriptive Epidemiology Studies** – Research that only presents statistical descriptions of cancer incidence, prevalence, or mortality without a clear hypothesis-driven approach or intervention component.

This delineation ensures that funded research aligns with our mission to drive forward-thinking, translational, and patient-centred cancer innovations.

The following table summarises the different Priority Areas and Subareas related to this Programme, where R&I have potential to develop in Malta:

Priority Areas	Molecular Research and Diagnostic Innovations	Community-Based Cancer Research	Therapeutic Development and Clinical Strategies	Psychosocial Support and Patient-Centred Approaches (for cancer patients and carers)
Subareas	Molecular Mechanisms Molecular Diagnostics Theranostics (Therapy combined with Diagnostics)	Community engagement to enhance effectiveness of cancer prevention Community engagement for early detection strategies	Biological Therapeutics Pharmaceutical Therapeutics Proximity to cure Pre-clinical Innovation Clinical Methodologies	Emotional Support Social Support Psychological Support

2.2 Contacts

For general enquires kindly contact:

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3 Definitions

Kindly note that the below definitions are harmonised throughout schemes administered by Xjenza Malta, and some terms might not be present within the text of these Rules as they are not relevant.

Agreement Date	The term refers to the date on which the Grant Agreement is signed by the legal representative of Xjenza Malta.
Applicant	The term refers to any representative of a local entity that is eligible for participation in a Project in terms of these National Rules for Participation and who applies for funding under this initiative.
Arm's length	The term means that the conditions of the transaction between the contracting parties do not differ from those which would be stipulated between independent undertakings and contain no element of collusion. Any transaction that results from an open, transparent and non-discriminatory procedure is considered as meeting the arm's length principle.
Beneficiary	The term Beneficiary refers to the entity that having submitted an application form for funding under this Programme in accordance with these National Rules for Participation, is selected for funding.
Due Diligence	An investigation of an entity or person prior to the signing of the Grant Agreement conducted in order to establish the suitability of the Applicant to receive funding under this Programme.
Effective collaboration	The term means collaboration between at least two independent parties to exchange knowledge or technology, or to achieve a common objective based on the division of labour where the parties jointly define the scope of the

	collaborative project, contribute to its implementation and share its risks, as well as its results. One or several parties may bear the full costs of the project and thus relieve other parties of its financial risks. Contract research and provision of research services are not considered forms of collaboration.
Eligible direct costs	The term refers to those costs incurred directly by the national beneficiaries during the duration of the project and used primarily for the purpose of achieving the objectives of the project. All eligible expenses must be incurred between the Start Date and the End Date of the Project and capped at the approved requested funding value.
End Date	This term refers to the date when the Project Period, having commenced on the Start Date, expires.
Evaluators	Evaluators are the consultants who responded to Xjenza Malta's Call for Applications to provide evaluation services for submissions made through this Programme
Grant Agreement	The term refers to the funding agreement concluded between the Managing Agency and the Beneficiary/ies and specifies the rights and obligations of the contracting parties
In-kind	The term refers to any non-monetary contribution, such as a service or a good.
Industry (Industrial Entity)	The term refers to a legal entity, including but not limited to a single undertaking the objects and activities of which include the output of a specified product and service. In addition to research and innovation contributions and knowledge transfer, the entity may contribute to the project

	by developing, testing, commercialising or using such a product or service.
Innovation	The term is defined as the internationally novel scientific/technological development of a technological process, product, or service. Also, the definition of innovation within the same context can also be applied to non-novel, yet step-change/ground-breaking enhancement of existing technological processes, products, or services, or even the application of existing knowledge to new novel applications of these solutions to deliver step-change competitiveness through such an application.
Intellectual Property (IP)	IP means statutory and other proprietary rights and includes patents, trademarks, designs, and confidential information/trade secrets, copyright.
Lead Agency	The primary organization tasked with overseeing and coordinating the entirety of the call process.
Legal Entity	The term refers to any entity created within the European Union, having an operating base in Malta and which has legal personality, which may, acting under its own name, exercise rights and be subject to obligations.
Managing Agency	The term refers to Xjenza Malta, a Managing Agency established as per Subsidiary Legislation 595.49.
Operating base in Malta	Having an Operating base in Malta refers to a Legal Entity that: i. Owns, leases, or has been given the right of use by a third party, an adequate premise from where to

	conduct an eligible economic activity in the region of Malta; and ii. Employs at least one person that is based in Malta and is liable to pay income tax in Malta.
Partner	The term is defined as an entity within a consortium..
Person months / Person hours	The term refers to a calculation of 'human effort' to evaluate the relationship between the estimated work to be performed and the activities and deliverables to be achieved during the implementation period in months or hours. This is calculated as follows: if 1720 hours are worked in 1 year, equivalent to 215 days of 8 hours each, then 1 person month is equivalent to 143.3... person hours, and to circa 17.91 days.
Personnel costs	The term means the costs of researchers, technicians and other supporting staff to the extent employed on the relevant project or activity.
Principal Investigator	The term refers to the lead researcher on behalf of the local Applicant/Beneficiary of a project consortium. May be the same as the Project Coordinator and/or the Project Contact Point.
Project Contact Point	The term refers to the individual, appointed to act on behalf of the Beneficiary and who is responsible for communicating with the Managing Agency about the Project. i. The Project Contact Point(s) shall have the following responsibilities: ii. To ensure compliance with the obligations in terms of the Grant Agreement.

	iii. To compile Periodic Reports and Final Reports including their timely submissions and effective execution of the project. iv. To ensure the submission of all required financial reporting as per the contractual obligations for the partner. v. To execute the project activities according to set timeframes and deliverables.
Project Grant	The term is defined as the funding provided to the Beneficiary under the Programme.
Project Period	The term refers to the time required to execute the Project as indicated in the Grant Agreement and runs from the Start Date to the End Date.
Project Value	The term refers to the project budget needed by the Applicant to carry out the project, including any co-financing.
Public Entity	The term refers to any Ministry, Department, Entity, Authority, Public Commission, Public Sector Foundation or a similar organisation that does not carry out an economic activity within the meaning of Article 107 TFEU and that exercises public power, or else acts in its own capacity as public authority, where the activity in question forms part of the essential function of the State or is connected with those functions by its nature, its aim and the rules to which it is subject. However, the classification of a particular entity as an undertaking depends entirely on the nature of its activities, and the overriding criterion of consideration is whether it carries out an economic activity or not, e.g., an entity that is formally part of the public administration may nevertheless have to be regarded as an undertaking within

	the meaning of Article 107(1) of the Treaty. Thus, an entity that carries out both economic and non-economic activities is to be regarded as an undertaking only with regards to the former. In this case, if the economic activity can be separated from the exercise of public powers, then that entity acts as an undertaking in relation to that activity and the financing, the costs and the revenues of that economic activity shall be accounted for separately from the other non-commercial activities. If an economic activity cannot be separated from the exercise of public power, the activities exercised by that entity as a whole, remain connected with the exercise of those public powers and therefore fall outside the notion of an undertaking.
Research and Development	This term is defined as the systematic investigation, work or research carried out in any field of science or technology through experiment, theoretical work or analysis undertaken to acquire new knowledge, primarily directed towards a specific practical aim or objective, and includes: a) **Fundamental Research** means experimental or theoretical work undertaken primarily to acquire new knowledge of the underlying foundations of phenomena and observable facts, without any direct commercial application or use in view. b) **Industrial Research** means the planned research or critical investigation aimed at the acquisition of new knowledge and skills for developing new products, processes, or services or aimed at bringing about a significant improvement in existing products, processes or services including digital products, processes or services, in any area, technology, industry or sector (including, but not limited to, digital industries and technologies, such as super-computing, quantum technologies, block chain technologies, artificial

	intelligence, cyber security, big data and cloud technologies). It comprises the creation of components parts of complex systems and may include the construction of prototypes in a laboratory environment or in an environment with simulated interfaces to existing systems as well as of pilot lines, when necessary for the industrial research and notably for generic technology validation. c) **Experimental Development** means acquiring, combining, shaping and using existing scientific, technological, business and other relevant knowledge and skills with the aim of developing new or improved products, processes or services in any area, technology, industry or sector (including, but not limited to, digital industries and technologies, such as for example super-computing, quantum technologies, block chain technologies, artificial intelligence, cyber security, big data and cloud or edge technologies). This may also include, for example, activities aiming at the conceptual definition, planning and documentation of new products, processes or services. Experimental development may comprise prototyping, demonstrating, piloting, testing and validation of new or improved products, processes or services in environments representative of real-life operating conditions where the primary objective is to make further technical improvements on products, processes or services that are not substantially set. This may include the development of a commercially usable prototype or pilot which is necessarily the final commercial product, and which is too expensive to produce for it to be used only for demonstration and validation purposes. Experimental development does not include routine or periodic changes made to existing products,

	production lines, manufacturing processes, services, and other operations in progress, even if those changes may represent improvements. Only Research defined under b) and c) are eligible under this call.
Research and Knowledge-Dissemination Organisation (RKDO)	The term refers to an entity (such as universities or research institutes, technology transfer agencies, Innovation intermediaries, research-oriented physical or virtual collaborative entities), irrespective of its legal status (organised under public or private law) or way of financing, whose primary goal is to independently conduct fundamental research, industrial research or experimental development or to widely disseminate the results of such activities by way of teaching, publication or knowledge transfer. Where such entity also pursues economic activities the financing, the costs and the revenues of those economic activities must be accounted for separately. Undertakings that can exert a decisive influence upon such an entity, in the quality of, for example, shareholders or members, may not enjoy preferential access to the results generated by it.
Start Date	The term refers to date established for the official start of the project in the Grant Agreement.
Start of Works	This term refers to the earlier of either the Start of Works relating to the investment, or the first legally binding commitment to order equipment or any other commitment that makes the investment irreversible. Buying land and preparatory works such as obtaining permits and conducting feasibility studies are not considered 'Start of Works'. For take-overs, 'Start of Works' means the moment of acquiring the assets directly linked to the acquired establishment.

Subcontracted Activity	The term refers to any activity related to the project, (including but not limited to consultancy), which is not carried out directly by a Beneficiary or its employees but is carried out under any terms by any third party (local or foreign) individual, company, partnership, or entity.

4 Eligibility Criteria and Applications

This section provides details as to the criteria which must be satisfied in order to assess the entity's eligibility to apply and the application's fit within this Programme.

These Rules for Participation are applicable to **Maltese public entities and public research and knowledge dissemination organisations that do not carry out an economic activity within the meaning of Article 107 TFEU. Projects which fall within TRLs 1-7 are eligible.**

Given the aims of the Cancer Research Programme, it is integral that any proposal that will be considered for funding aligns with the Priority Areas outlined in Section 2.1, in addition to implementing a scientific basis and highlighting the research methodology to be conducted. **Both sole applicants and consortia** are eligible to apply for the Cancer Research Programme.

Any Applicants which, at the time of proposal submission, are considered by the Managing Agency to be non-compliant with respect to Grant Agreement obligations on other active project funded by Xjenza Malta, may be immediately deemed ineligible at the application stage or may be refused funding under this programme. For the purposes of this paragraph, non-compliance with respect to Grant Agreement obligations shall also be deemed to include failure to respect approved project timelines on other projects funded by the Managing Agency and circumstances where the Applicant is in recognised default of Grant Agreement obligations on any other active project funded by the Managing Agency. Similarly, should Applicants become non-compliant during the call process, they will not be awarded funding under this programme.

Any Application may be deemed as ineligible in terms of these Rules for Participation, if it is submitted by or includes the participation of any person or entity having, in

totality or in majority ownership, the same shareholders, partners or persons holding and/ or exercising a controlling power in any other legal entity which was at any time declared as non-compliant or defaulting on any other contract or agreement entered into with the Managing Agency.

4.1 Conflicts of Interest

Applicant/s and/or Beneficiary/ies shall take all measures to prevent any situation where the impartial and objective processing of their Application for funding, the awarding of the Grant or the supervision or the implementation of the Grant agreement could be compromised for reasons involving family, emotional life, political or national affinity, economic interest or any other direct or indirect or perceived interest (conflict of interests).

Applicant/s and/or Beneficiary/ies shall formally notify the Managing Agency without delay of any situation constituting or likely to lead to an actual or perceived conflict of interest and immediately take all of the necessary steps to rectify this situation.

The Managing Agency may verify that the measures taken are appropriate and may require additional measures to be taken by a specified deadline.

Where a beneficiary wilfully breaches any of its obligations under this Rule, this shall be deemed to constitute an Event of Default and the Application may be deemed ineligible or the Grant awarded may be reduced and/or terminated.

5 Consortium

5.1 Composition

A project application may also be submitted by a Consortium, consisting of any combination of eligible entities as follows:

- One (or more) Partner/s may be a **Maltese Registered Public Entity and/or Public Research and Knowledge Dissemination Organisation**. Such entities would need to apply under the Aid Rules for Participation Option B.

And/ Or

- One (or more) Partner/s may be a **Maltese Registered undertaking that carries out an economic activity**. Such entities would need to apply under the Rules for Participation Option A1 or A2 (depending on funding route).

Hence eligible consortia include:

- Two or more Maltese Registered **Public** entities **and/or Public Research and Knowledge Dissemination Organisation**
- Two or more Maltese Registered **undertakings** that carry out an economic activity
- One or more Maltese Registered **Public** entities **and/or Public Research and Knowledge Dissemination Organisation** along with one or more Maltese Registered **undertakings** that carry out an economic activity

Each individual partner must abide by their respective Rules for Participation (Option A1, A2 or B).

The relevant Appendix to the application should be completed by each partner.

One of the Partners should be designated as the Lead Partner and appoint a Principal Investigator. The Lead Partner will be responsible for the application submission of the R&I project, the appointment of a project contact point and the correct execution of the project. Any person may only be involved with one project partner (Refer to Section 5.2).

In the case of consortium, applications shall be submitted by the Project Lead on behalf of the Consortium and must be endorsed and signed by the legal representative of each partner. Where the legal representative is unable to provide such endorsement, an authorised delegate may sign on their behalf, provided that the appropriate delegation of authority is submitted.

The role of the Project Contact Point shall be performed by a physical person who is an employee of the Lead Partner.

A Consortium Partner wishing to withdraw from a Project, must present their case to the Managing Agency through their Principal Investigator. As a result, and at its discretion, the Managing Agency may request the refunding of money disbursed to that partner back to the Cancer Research and Innovation Hub Malta and may even

terminate the Cancer Research Project in its entirety (meaning that all funds may be requested in part or in full by the Managing Agency). All Project partners would still be obliged to provide all technical and financial reporting at their own expense. In extenuating circumstances, the Managing Agency may at its discretion, consider suggestions for replacement of a Partner. However, the project proposal would need to be re-evaluated. Should this be the case, the overall rules for participation would need to be adhered to and the technical and financial distribution of the projects should remain unchanged.

The Principal Investigator has overall responsibility for the project, and shall have the following responsibilities:

- ✓ To **coordinate the timely development and execution of the project**, including establishing and managing project activities, timeframes and financial estimates;
- ✓ To **coordinate the timely activities of the individual project partners** *(in case of a consortium)* on an ongoing basis, and to ensure that they fulfil their obligations in terms of the Contractual Agreement;
- ✓ To **compile all reports** including Technical and Financial Reports including submissions by all project Partners *(in case of a consortium)* in a timely manner;
- ✓ To **act as the main point of contact between the Managing Agency and the project Partners (in case of consortia);**
- ✓ To ensure that the consortium **complies with all obligations** assigned within the contract governing this grant;
- ✓ Appointing a Project Contact Point to **act as the main point of contact between the Managing Agency and the project Partners** *(in case of a consortium)*

5.2 Conflict with Fundamental Aim of Programme

Pertaining to the Arm's length principal, the participation of individuals in a Consortium must not be of such nature as to create conflicts with the fundamentals of knowledge transfer and commercialisation, which are the foremost aims of the Cancer Research Programme.

Two legal entities shall be regarded as independent of each other where neither is under the direct or indirect control of the other or under the same direct or indirect control as the other. Control may take either of the following forms:

a) The direct or indirect holding of more than 50% of the nominal value of the issued share capital in the legal entity concerned, or a majority of the voting rights of the shareholders or associates of that entity.

b) The direct or indirect holding, in fact or in law, of decision-making powers in the legal entity concerned.

The following relationships between legal entities shall not in themselves be deemed to constitute controlling relationships:

a) The same public investment corporation, institutional investor or venture-capital company has a direct or indirect holding of more than 50% of the nominal value of the issued share capital or a majority of voting rights of the shareholders or associates.

b) The legal entities concerned are owned or supervised by the same public body.

Partners in the same Consortium cannot be involved in any commercial transaction with another Partner in the same Consortium, or any other entity with shared shareholding, or any other entity within the same group of companies as the Partner, on any matter related to the R&I Project.

6 Applicability of State Aid Rules |Option B - Non-State Aid

These Rules for Participation allow eligibility under a non-state aid route.

Under these Rules, applicants must be considered a **Maltese public entity, or a public research and knowledge dissemination organisation,** as defined in Section 3, that does not carry out an economic activity within the meaning of Article 107 TFEU.

Those entities that may be eligible for participation under this route shall be required to declare themselves as:

1. A **public "research and knowledge dissemination organisation**" as defined in the Commission Framework for State aid for research and development and

innovation (2022/C 414/01) paragraph 16 (ff), which carries out a non-economic activity in line with the following:

(a) primary activities of research organisations and research infrastructures, in particular:

- education for more and better skilled human resources.
- independent R&D for more knowledge and better understanding, including collaborative R&D where the research organisation or research infrastructure engages in effective collaboration;
- wide dissemination of research results on a non-exclusive and non-discriminatory basis, for example through teaching, open-access databases, open publications or open software;

(b) knowledge transfer activities, where they are conducted either by the research organisation or research infrastructure (including their departments or subsidiaries) or jointly with, or on behalf of other such entities, and where all profits from those activities are reinvested in the primary activities of the research organisation or research infrastructure. The non-economic nature of those activities is not prejudiced by contracting the provision of corresponding services to third parties by way of open tenders.

OR,

2. A **public** entity whose activity does not constitute an economic activity in the meaning of Article 107 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union[1]. "Indirect State aid to undertakings through public funded research and knowledge dissemination organisations and research infrastructures" of the Framework for State aid for research and development and innovation (2022/C 414/01).

[1] Refer to chapter 2 of the commission notice on "the notion of State aid referred to in an article 107(1) of the Functioning of the European Union" (2016/C 262/01) for further guidance

7 The Application Process

The Call for Project Proposals will be open between **28th September 2026 to 23:59PM on the 7th December 2026. Proposals which are received after the deadline stipulated will be deemed administratively non-compliant.** The selection and funding of proposals under this Programme shall be on a competitive basis.

Applicants should refer to the eligibility criteria in Section 4, Section 5 and Section 6.

7.1 Application Submission

The Cancer Research Programme project application shall present a coherent, comprehensive and credible proposal clearly demonstrating rationale, objectives, methodology, implementation approach and expected multifaceted impact of the proposed research.

The legal representative/s of the participating organisation must either physically or electronically[2] sign off the application and enter the date of signature. This/these individual/s must also sign off and date all relevant declarations found within the Appendices of the Application Form.

Submission, evaluation and selection of project applications will be in the form of a **single-stage process meaning modifications by the applicant or negotiations on the content are not allowed, once submission has been made. Only major and minor deviations maybe altered at the discretion of the Managing Agency as mentioned below.**

Where errors in the budget are identified during the administrative evaluation, these will be categorised by the Managing Agency as either:

- Major deviations, affecting 10% or more of the requested grant value, or involving significant errors in the required documentation
- Minor deviations, affecting less than 10% of the requested grant value

[2] For the purposes of these Rules for Participation, electronic signatures shall be accepted, provided that they comply with the requirements of Regulation (EU) No 910/2014 (eIDAS) and are legally valid under the applicable legislation.

Minor deviations may be corrected and administratively evaluated. Where the application is successful, the applicant shall be given the opportunity to either accept the required amendments and proceed with the project or decline the award.

Major deviations shall be assessed by the Managing Agency. Where appropriate and depending on the nature and severity of the deviation, the applicant may be invited to address the identified deficiencies within a timeframe as determined by the Managing Agency. **Failure to submit the required corrections within the prescribed timeframe, where rectification is permitted, shall render the application administratively non-compliant and ineligible for further consideration.** In cases where the deviation is fundamental or prevents proper evaluation of the application, the application may be declared administratively non-compliant without the opportunity of rectification.

All administratively compliant applications shall be evaluated according to the procedure outlined under Section 12 of these Rules for Participation. **The approved Application Form and these rules for participation shall be appended to the Grant Agreements for successful Applicants and shall form part of the Grant Agreement, including its technical obligations.**

Any text within the submitted application, which are more than the prescribed maximum word count and/or page limits, shall be **disregarded in the scientific evaluation process**.

7.2 Submission Documents

All submissions must include the following documentation:

- ✓ The **application form shall be submitted** in **MS Word (.docx)** format, with a signed copy in PDF (.pdf) format The Application form shall include:
  - A clear description of the identified research challenge, proposed solution and relevance to the selected Priority Area
  - The proposed research methodology and implementation approach.
  - A detailed project plan setting out activities, work packages, milestones, deliverables and timeframes, supported by a Gantt Chart.

- Where applicable, clearly defined roles, responsibilities and contributions of each consortium partner
- The principal scientific, technical and implementation risks, together with appropriate mitigation measures
- Where applicable, a description of the activities to be undertaken by external collaborators and the expertise required
- A precise indication of project costs within the application
- Relevant previous and/or ongoing funded activities, demonstrating the additionality of the proposed project and the absence of double funding.

✓ **Detailed Budget Breakdown Form** [3]

- This form shall be submitted in **MS Excel (.xlsx)** and **PDF (.pdf) for each consortium partner** (where applicable).

✓ **Curricula Vitae**

- **Curricula Vitae** of key researchers including relevant track records. These should clearly establish the potential and capacity to carrying out the project.

✓ **IP agreement**

- An IP Agreement signed by all Consortium Partners, setting out the arrangements, governing background and foreground intellectual property, ownership and access rights, use and exploitation of project results, and the rights and obligations of each Partner in relation to such results. The agreement shall ensure that the agreed IP arrangements do not unnecessarily restrict the validation, uptake, further development or exploitation of project results. The Agreement shall also clearly establish the rights of participating Primary Agricultural Producer(s) to access and use project results relevant to their participation, including for testing, validation and demonstration purposes, as applicable

[3] The template for this document may be found on the Resource Page on the Xjenza Malta website - https://xjenzamalta.mt/resources-page/

- ✓ **Dissemination and externalisation plan**
    - A plan outlining how project results and knowledge generated will be **communicated, disseminated and, where applicable, exploited** or taken up by relevant stakeholders and end users. This plan can be included as an annex to the application form and must be tied to at least one Work Package
- ✓ **Letters of intent**
    - Such documents or equivalent documentary evidence are necessary to confirm the commitment of external researchers (where applicable) to collaborate on the Project. These are to be signed and dated.
- ✓ **Signed Additional Declarations**.
    - The additional declarations found appended to the application form template shall be completed and signed by all partners in the consortium.

Additional Documentation – Option B

Applicants requesting funding under Option B shall additionally submit:

- ✓ The **Declarations** applicable to the non-state aid route (where State Aid is not applicable).
- ✓ Signed **Indirect State Aid Declaration Form** in the case of consortia between a public and a private entity.

The additional documentation to be submitted for this call can be found on the Xjenza Malta resource page here: https://xjenzamalta.mt/resources-page/

It should be noted that emails larger than 20MB shall be automatically rejected by the system. The Applicant may make use of WeTransfer, Google Drive or any other software.

Application Forms can be sent electronically to rtdi.xjenzamalta@gov.mt, keeping Ms Giulia Aquilina (giulia.aquilina@gov.mt), Ms Enya-Maria Haber (enya-maria.haber@gov.mt) Mr Isaac Grixti (isaac.grixti.1@gov.mt), and Mr Mark Farrugia

(mark.c.farrugia@gov.mt) in copy, with "Cancer Research Programme Submission 2027 Call" as a subject.

It is the responsibility of the Applicant to ensure that a confirmation of receipt is provided.

All received applications shall be acknowledged in writing or by email. Incomplete applications as of **7th December 2026 at 11:59pm** will not be considered.

Physical submissions of applications or supporting documents will not be accepted under any circumstances. Applicants are strongly encouraged to double-check their submissions to ensure completeness and correct format.

7.3 Considerations at Application Stage

7.3.1 Respecting Lead Times

All organisations, including the Managing Agency, have their internal procedures for processing, approving and signing off on legally binding documents. Beneficiaries are to ensure that they are aware of these lead times in their organisation as well as in the other organisations which may be involved. It is the Applicant's responsibility to ask for information on lead times pertaining to the Managing Agency. Applicants should also consider personal commitments, vacation leave etc, when planning to submit an application.

All project application submissions, which must reach the Managing Agency by the deadline, must be dated and signed by the Lead Partner's legal representative/s and must include signatures of the legal representatives of each respective participating organisation in the case of a Consortium.

7.3.2 Assistance with Applications

Prospective Project Applicants are encouraged to seek the advice of Xjenza Malta in the preparation of the project application. This should help identify any areas of concern prior to the submission of the application and lead to a better quality of submission. Advice shall only be given in respect to these Rules for Participation and not on technical grounds. **Applicants are particularly encouraged to seek Xjenza Malta's and CRIHM's guidance through proposal-specific one-to-one sessions to ensure that the single-stage application documentation is complete and**

effective. One-to-one sessions and correspondences seeking advice should be done latest **one week** before the closing date for this call.

8 Confidentiality of Submissions

All project application submissions shall be treated in the strictest confidence.

Without prejudice to the generality of the above it is only the name of the entity, the Principal Investigator, the title of proposal and the abstract which may in the course of the process be published.

The collection of data by the Managing Agency through the application for aid under the Programme, submitted by the Applicant and the subsequent processing of said data by the Managing Agency to evaluate the data subject's request for aid under the Programme and the storage of said data shall at all times be in accordance with:

i. The provision of these Rules for Participation;

ii. Data Protection Act (CAP 586 of the Laws of Malta) and Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Managing Agency of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data and repealing Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation).

iii. The legitimate basis to process personal data submitted by the data subject by virtue of his/her written application for aid is Regulation 6 (1)(b) of the General Data Protection Regulation ("GDPR"), as 'processing is necessary in order to take steps at the request of the data subject prior to entering into a contract'.

Further information may be found within the application form.

9 Programme Parameters

Xjenza Malta, in collaboration with the Cancer Research and Innovation Hub Malta, reserve the right to carry out financial and/or technical audits at their discretion, at any

time during the duration of the project to ensure that Programme Parameters, as per contractual obligations are being observed.

9.1 Project Start Date and Duration

The project must start by at least **1 June 2027** or as otherwise stated by Xjenza Malta. The possible project duration is up to **36 months, without the possibility of an extension**.

9.2 Project Grant

The **maximum** possible grant value for a project is €300,000.

9.3 Deliverables

Deliverables are tangible outcomes of the project and must be **submissible.** They must be proposed between the start date and end date of the project. Deliverables not planned within the project timelines will not be considered. **If the project is awarded, evidence should be submitted for each deliverable described in the application form to ensure that it has been attained successfully.**

Each deliverable shall be clearly described in the Application Form, including its purpose, expected output, format, means of verification and contribution towards the relevant project objective(s). Where applicable, appropriate acceptance criteria shall also be established to enable the achievement of the deliverable to be assessed.

The submission of a deliverable shall be accompanied by sufficient information and supporting evidence to enable the Managing Agency to understand its content, relevance and contribution to the project. Deliverables may take the form of presentations, reports, correspondence, legal agreements, images, event agendas, audio recordings, videos, databases, certificates, manuscripts or any other format deemed acceptable by the Managing Agency. The submission of a file or output alone shall not be considered sufficient where its purpose, functionality, results and contribution to the project cannot be adequately assessed.

The content of each deliverable should be proportionate to the research effort carried out to obtain such results. Where applicable, deliverables shall also provide evidence of the results achieved against the relevant baseline, indicators, targets and/or acceptance criteria established within the approved Application Form.

Each proposed deliverable shall be assigned a percentage weighting reflecting the contribution to the achievement of the overall project objectives The cumulative weighting of all mandatory and additional deliverables shall amount to 100%. The Interim Financial Report, the End of Project Audited Financial Report, as well as the Post Project Feedback, shall not assigned a percentage weighting, given their separate and mandatory nature.

Failure to submit a deliverable without adequate justification may result in a reduction of the grant proportionate to the weighting assigned to that deliverable, together with an additional penalty of 2% of the grant value for each affected deliverable.

It is required that:

- File storing and synchronization service e.g., Google Drive or Dropbox, is set up and shared with the Managing Agency to support the project monitoring process. The shared folder should reflect the structure of deliverables provided in the application form i.e., every deliverable should have its own sub-folder with evidence saved within.

- Xjenza Malta should be notified by email each time there are new documents updated within the file storage system, detailing a log of added, removed and/or modified documents are necessary.

- Following each due date a soft copy of the final version of the deliverable/s will be held at Xjenza Malta which will then be considered the final version. Where deliverables require periodic submissions (e.g., monthly reports, reports on IP status), it is only the final submission that will be considered as the final deliverable. All submitted deliverables should still be held on the file storage system for at least 6 months following the successful closure of the project.

- A copy of all deliverables must be presented to Xjenza Malta before any retention is disbursed.

The sub-sections below list the Mandatory Deliverables that are required by the Managing Agency and a non-exhaustive list of Recommended deliverables that may

be considered. The project plan should provide sufficient details of planned activities and incorporate these deliverables into the project proposal.

9.3.1 Mandatory Deliverables

All projects shall include the following mandatory deliverables, adapted where necessary to the nature and maturity of the proposed research.

- ✓ Report on Project Progress

1. **Project Kick-Off and Progress Monitoring** (Presentation Format)

   A Kick-Off Meeting shall be held at the commencement of the project, followed by **Project Progress Meetings** at six-month intervals, and a **Final Project Meeting** at project completion.

   Progress meetings shall provide evidence progress against the approved work plan, deliverables, milestones, indicators and project expenditure.

   The Managing Agency reserves the right to request additional project-monitoring meetings where necessary.

2. **Interim Technical Report**

   This report must be submitted mid-way through the project. This shall be prepared and submitted by the Lead Beneficiary.

3. **Interim Financial Report**

   This report shall be submitted within one month from the mid-way point of the project. A financial report should be submitted by each Consortium Member.

4. **End of Project Technical Report**

   This Report must be submitted at the end of the project. This shall be prepared and submitted by the Lead Beneficiary.

5. **Post Project Feedback (or its equivalent).**

   In a format and manner as requested by the Managing Agency, unless formally waived or discontinued by the Managing Agency.

6. **End of Project Audited Financial Report**

   This report must be submitted within two months of the completion of the project to account for lead time and payroll in the lifetime of the project. A financial report should be submitted by each Consortium Member.

The Reports must include sufficient evidence on the achievement of the project objectives, as well as the parameters indicated in the application, and they must be provided in accordance with the templates provided to the Principal Investigator by the Managing Agency.

- ✓ **One Article in Local Media**[4]

Publish at least one article in public media (e.g., local newspapers or magazines) to raise public awareness, including an acknowledgement to the Managing Agency and CRIHM. A copy should be presented to Xjenza Malta within two weeks of publication. These should not contain intellectual property but should raise awareness about the project and its benefits.

- ✓ **Research and Impact Landing Roadmap**

Projects shall establish an appropriate baseline and a Research and Impact Roadmap setting out the expected project results, relevant indicators, baseline values, targets, measurement methods, evidence sources, responsible Partner(s) and verification points.

A preliminary framework shall be provided at application stage and shall be provided updated mid-way through the project.

This shall be prepared and submitted by the Lead Beneficiary.

The Beneficiaries shall at all times cooperate with the Managing Agency in the promotion of the Cancer Research Programme by delivering presentations about the Project or through other reasonable means at the request of the Managing Agency or the CRIHM.

[4] Public media must demonstrate outreach to a general audience and shall not include publications or platforms targeting predominantly academic or institutional stakeholders.

Any changes to the project objectives, work-packages or any other parameter committed to in the application, are to be communicated in writing with clear justification to the Managing Agency prior to the deadline. The written request will be referred to the Unit Director for approval. The Managing Agency will acknowledge receipt and endeavour to reply in a timely manner so that the momentum of the project remains unaffected.

Acceptance or otherwise of any changes shall be at the sole discretion of the Managing Agency, and the decision shall be binding, final and irrevocable. Any other communication shall not be considered valid or binding.

9.3.2 Recommended Deliverables

Further to the mandatory deliverables, Xjenza Malta recommends that additional deliverables are included. The proposed recommended deliverables **should not exceed ten (10)**. Although the deliverables listed below are not mandatory, the inclusion of relevant and proportionate additional deliverables may strengthen the proposal where they provide clear added value towards the achievement of the project, objectives and expected impact. The recommended deliverables may include:

- ✓ **Registration of patents on the work carried out throughout the project (or any tangible outcomes during the patenting process).**
- ✓ The formation of any spin-off entities that are envisioned. Kindly highlight if these spin-offs will also be licenced any IP generated.
- ✓ Monograph/s and/or peer-reviewed paper/s for accepted publication in international open access journal/s of repute based on the work carried out through the Project;
- ✓ Oral presentation/s at international conference/s on the work carried out through the Project;
- ✓ The attainment of undergraduate degrees and/or postgraduate degrees and/or post-doctoral research. (In cases where the project duration is insufficient for the purpose of submitting a degree, there has to be a commitment to complete the degree outside the duration of the project utilising other sources of funding.)

- ✓ A strategic plan to assess the research after its conclusion, how to further exploit and develop the results.
- ✓ Reports after the conclusion of testing, to highlight the generation of new knowledge.
- ✓ Additional project dissemination activities including but not limited to: fairs, workshops and events. Examples include; Science in the City, R&I cafes, Enterprise European Network events, project exhibitions and so on.
- ✓ Commercial commitments such as technology innovations to be included in a partner's existing product or service.
- ✓ Commercial commitments such as technology transfer licences.

Any activities which are related to project set-up shall not be considered as acceptable deliverables. These include:

- × Recruitment of personnel
- × Procurement of equipment
- × Internal meetings between the research team/ with collaborators.
- × Ethical Approval

Kindly note that the list of recommended deliverables given above are indicative not exhaustive.

The Managing Agency appreciates that the fulfilment of the additional deliverables may be dependent on external factors. The Beneficiary is expected to take such external factors into consideration when submitting their application form. **Although these deliverables are non-compulsory, if listed as committed deliverables at application stage, they must be adhered to.**

In the case of publications, these should take place during the duration of the project, and where available and possible, deposited in the entity's repository, including an acknowledgement to Xjenza Malta and CRIHM.

Where a Beneficiary has committed to submitting a research paper for publication, but the paper is not accepted for publication within the project duration, the Beneficiary shall provide sufficient documentary evidence demonstrating that the paper was submitted for publication and subsequently rejected. Where the Managing Agency is satisfied that a genuine attempt to fulfil the deliverable was made, the Beneficiary shall not be considered in breach of this obligation.

A copy of all publication submissions must be presented to the Managing Agency before the end date of the project otherwise the Managing Agency reserves the right to withhold funds accordingly.

10 Eligible Costs (Under Option B of these Rules of Participation)

Eligible direct costs are those costs incurred directly by the applicant during the lifetime of the project, and which are primarily used to achieve the objectives of the project. **All eligible expenses must be incurred between the Start Date and the End Date of the Project** and must be limited to the budgeted value.

The **Eligible Direct Costs** are:

- **Personnel Costs**

Costs of employed researchers, technicians and other supporting staff to the extent employed on the project.

There are no limitations posed with regard to the number of employees involved in a single project. Furthermore, both new and existing personnel shall be eligible for funding. **A minimum of 30% of the project value must be dedicated to research hours.**

Management costs are limited to **10% of the project value**. Any project management which is not carried out by any of the partners shall be deemed to be subcontracting and, apart from being subject to the 10% maximum threshold detailed herein, will also be calculated as part of the 25% maximum referred to in the subcontracting costs. Note that employees which are existing personnel within a subsidiary of a group of companies are considered as a partner and are not eligible as a subcontracted cost.

Employees that have utilised elsewhere their allocated quota of research hours defined in their contract can apply for pro rata payment, **up to a maximum of an additional 10 hours per week**, for supervisory, research or management hours **(overseas travel hours are ineligible)** as an eligible cost of the project, if this is permissible within their contract of employment.

The hourly rate (z) is calculated using the following formula:

€ z = (basic salary + allowances)/yearly workable hours of the employee

Eligible salaries are pinned to the hourly rates in the Table below (including National Insurance and other contributions) and personnel limits per project:

Role in Project	***Hourly rates 2027***	***Hourly rates 2028***	***Hourly Rates 2029***	***Limits per project (persons)***
	max	*max*	*max*	
Manager	Up to €63.82/hour	Up to €67.01/hour	Up to €70.36/hour	Max 2 per project
Senior Researcher[5], IP executive or equivalent	Up to €44.98/hour	Up to €47.23/hour	Up to €49.59/hour	Max 2 per project
Researcher[6], IP officer or equivalent	Up to €32.22/hour	Up to €33.83/hour	Up to €35.52/hour	No Limits
Operational, technician, research support assistant or equivalent	Up to €17.67/hour	Up to €18.55/hour	Up to €19.48/hour	No Limits

. Provided that whereas the Table above specifies maximum hourly rates, the Beneficiary shall ensure that the hourly rate of remuneration payable shall not, at any time, be less than the applicable minimum wage as established by Maltese law, including any applicable Wage Regulation Orders issued under the Employment and Industrial Relations Act (Chapter 452 of

[5] *The term 'senior researcher' is to be used for a postdoctoral researcher with a specialist and high level of local and international experience in the field. Individuals possessing a high level of experience in industry can still be considered. The Applicant is to confirm this judgement with Xjenza Malta well in advance of submitting the application form.*

[6] *The term 'researcher' is to be used for a Bachelor's, Master's or a Ph.D. degree holder and hence the hourly rate should be equivalent to the degree held by the relevant individual.* ***Individuals possessing a high level of experience in industry can still be considered. The Applicant is to confirm this judgement with Xjenza Malta well in advance of submitting the application form.'***

the Laws or Malta) or national minimum wage standards, as may be amended from time to time. The Beneficiary undertakes to adjust hourly rates of remuneration accordingly to ensure continued compliance with any changes in the statutory minimum wage.

Personnel in salary brackets that are higher than those noted above will still only be reimbursed at the rates of the eligible brackets above, depending on their role in the project.

The hourly rates will have to be noted in the application, along with the number of hours on the project per individual *(Please note that the maximum number of reimbursable hours per individual personnel through the project is **1720 per year**).*

In the case of existing personnel, the names of the individuals will have to be noted in the application and within the budget sheet and their respective CVs need to also be submitted. Where personnel are yet to be recruited, the relevant role shall be clearly identified as such in the Detailed Budget Breakdown Form. The CV of the individual subsequently recruited shall be submitted to the Managing Agency, following their engagement and prior to the related personnel costs being claimed.

Students can be engaged on the project and be paid an annual stipend of € 6,000 when reading for a full-time Master's degree or an annual stipend of € 8,000 when reading for a full-time Doctoral degree. In the case of a part-time Post-graduate degree, the respective stipend will be calculated pro-rata and at the discretion of the Xjenza Malta. Students must be engaged through a Maltese academic entity. Where the applying entity is not a Maltese Academic Entity, reasonable supervisory fees are eligible under subcontracting.

Note that for every engaged student, 1 full-time equivalent researcher must be employed by the entity or consortium.

Completed time sheets are to be retained for all personnel (including students), as proof of the number of hours spent on the project. Documentation of the utilisation of the employees' internally funded, research quota for other research activities is to be retained since this evidence may be required by the auditors.

With respect to the following eligible direct costs, kindly make sure that detailed information and specifications are provided for individual line items.

- **Instruments and Specialised equipment:** Purchasing and leasing of instruments and specialised equipment including software. The overall value of

instruments and specialised equipment cannot exceed 20% of the project value.

For an individual item of equipment or instrument over €15,000, **specifications and justification should be provided in the application form to describe the planned project utilisation of such instrument/equipment in relation to its performance characteristics**. If a specialised Laptop or PC is going to be purchased, **kindly specify its usage and specifications.**

- **Consumables**: The overall value of consumables cannot exceed 30% of the project value. Proposals with consumables exceeding 30% of the project value need to request a pre-agreed deviation at application stage.

  Kindly note that instruments, specialised equipment and consumables collectively, cannot exceed 50% of the project value.

- **Travel**: Travel is permitted for attending a conference or coordinating with foreign collaborators or stakeholders, up to a maximum of € 4,000. Only travel in relation to dissemination and externalisation activities is eligible.

- **Overheads and other Operating Expenses:** Overheads (also known as indirect costs) will be covered at 20% of the direct eligible costs, for all line items being requested. This also includes other operational expenses which are directly related to the project.

10.1 Subcontracted Activities

Subcontracted Activities must not exceed 25% of the project value. Subcontracted Activity means any activity related to the project, (including but not limited to consultancy), which is not carried out directly by the Beneficiary or its employees but is conducted by any third party (local or foreign) individual, company, partnership, or entity, under whatsoever terms and conditions.

Where a component of the project work is a Subcontracted Activity, the following considerations shall apply:

- ✓ The Lead Partner remains responsible for the timely delivery of the subcontracted tasks;

- ✓ The Lead Partner shall ensure that such a third party is selected in a manner which is transparent, fair and impartial.
- ✓ Lead Partner shall ensure that there is no discrimination between bidders and that all bidders are treated equally and transparently in all calls for quotations.
- ✓ The Lead Partner should ensure that the attainment of any services or goods respect their procurement guidelines.

Subcontracting shall be limited strictly to activities that are essential, specialised, and directly linked to the technical implementation of the project. Without prejudice to the existing provision that subcontracted project management contributes towards the project management limits applicable under personnel costs, the following shall apply:

Subcontracting activities that are administrative, clerical, or operational in nature, or that relate to the general administration of the project, are not eligible (ineligible) costs. Kindly refer to section 10.2 for a non-exhaustive list of ineligible costs. Subcontractors are not eligible to be Work Package Leaders.

Applicants are expected to clearly justify all subcontracting activities and demonstrate that they do not fall within the above exclusions.

Subcontracting to foreign companies should only be resorted to if suitable expertise is not available locally at a competitive price. This course of action must be duly justified. The Beneficiary may consider joint bids from subcontractors (local or foreign) if these are presented in the form of a supplier consortium. Preference will be given to partners who have previous experience working together on similar projects. Beneficiaries have to ensure that there is no discrimination between bidders, and that all bidders are to be treated equally and transparently in all calls for quotations.

10.2 Ineligible Costs

The non-exhaustive list below demonstrates examples of ineligible costs:

- × Expenses related to loans, interest, etc
- × Recoverable value added tax (VAT)
- × Expenses which are recoverable through other funding mechanisms

- Re-purchase of equipment originally procured through other funding mechanisms
- Purchase of equipment from partners or their subsidiaries within the consortium
- Opportunity costs related to foregone production and production downtime arising from the allocation of resources to the Project.
- Any activity related to the reproduction of a commercial product or process by a physical examination of an existing system or from plans, blueprints, detailed specifications or publicly available information.
- Standard office equipment/ stationery
- Organising conferences or business lunches
- Personnel hours for travelling.
- Employee Overtime
- Costs associated with Patent Filing/Registration
- Scientific Publication Costs (Funds may be obtained through other initiatives)
- Applying for or registering relevant Intellectual Property (e.g. patents for inventions, trademarks, copyrights, or design rights as applicable)
- Any costs related to the submission of the End of Project Audited Financial Report
- Any cost incurred to submit the proposal.
- Any costs incurred before the start date and after the end date of the project.

For the avoidance of doubt, ineligible subcontracting includes, but is not limited to, the following non-exhaustive list:

- General administrative support or back-office services
- Financial administration, bookkeeping, or accounting services
- Preparation of reports of an administrative or compliance nature

- Legal services **not directly related** to intellectual property protection, licensing, or technology transfer
- General consultancy services related to project administration, coordination, or compliance
- Human resources, payroll, or recruitment services
- Proposal writing, grant management, or grant administration services

Kindly note that this is a **non-exhaustive list**, and any line items not seen to be compliant with the nature of the Cancer Research Programme or state aid regulations will be subtracted from the grant.

In the event a cost which is not clearly ineligible/eligible is to be proposed, kindly contact Xjenza Malta for clarification. Any clarification is to be performed **at least 2 working days prior to the submission deadline.**

10.3 Aid Intensity

The Programme's financial contribution to a Beneficiary applying under these Rules for Participation, falling under the definition of a Maltese Public Entity or Public research and knowledge dissemination organisation not carrying out an economic activity, as specified in the above sections, shall be 100% of eligible costs.

10.4 Collaborators

Should the applicant have any collaborators, these must be included in the application form. The expected contribution/s by the said collaborators should be stated and supported by a **letter of intent**. These collaborators may be foreign or local. They are **not eligible** to receive direct funding through this grant.

Should a letter of intent be absent for a specific collaborator, that collaborator will not be considered at evaluation stage. Moreover, the respective letter of intents should be composed within the last three months before the deadline of the application.

11 Double Funding

Funding under this Programme is made available on the basis that none of the project partners would have benefited and will not benefit from any other grant or financial incentive of whatever nature, applied for and/or utilised for the same scope as that subject of the funding requested under this Programme. Provided that, in the case where the application covers work that is part of a larger project, the Beneficiary must submit a table as an appendix to the application form that shows a comprehensive list of the items of work and the source of funding for each item.

By signing the Grant Agreement, the Beneficiary is automatically accepting and authorising the Managing Agency to exchange essential information related to the project with other funding agencies, both local and overseas, for any necessary checks. Any occurrence of double funding should be communicated in writing to the Unit Director prior to the signing of the Grant Agreement.

12 Evaluation

Project applications will be evaluated through a three-step process. Primarily, projects will undergo an administrative compliance evaluation. At this stage, if any errors are noted, these will either be considered as a major deviation or minor deviation (kindly refer to Section 7.1 for further guidance).

If successful, projects will be forwarded to three external evaluators for External Evaluation. The highest ranked proposal from each Priority Area will be awarded. Subject to the availability of funds, the remaining projects will form a ranking list irrespective of the area and Xjenza Malta will award according to this list until the funds are consumed. Proposals which are determined to be outside the scope of the Priority Areas detailed in Section 2.1, according to the consensus of the three external evaluators, will automatically fail technical evaluation.

The Managing Agency may undertake a Due Diligence exercise through its contractors for the purpose of administrative compliance. Further assurances and documentation, such as bank guarantees, may be required at the discretion of the Managing Agency. In the event that the Due Diligence assessment established a high exposure risk to the Managing Agency, the application will be rejected or further assurances may be requested from the applicant for the application to remain under consideration.

For a project to be successful it must pass from all three-steps.

Changes to the submitted proposal are not allowed prior to the Grant Agreement, unless requested and/or approved by the Managing Agency.

12.1 Evaluation Criteria

Failure to achieve a minimum of **70%** pass from External Evaluation will lead to rejection of the proposal.

External Evaluators will be evaluating project applications for the following criteria:

Excellence 40marks Threshold 30 marks

Kindly refer to Section 6.1 of the application form.

Impact 30 marks: Threshold 20 marks

Kindly refer to Section 6.2 of the application form.

Implementation 30 marks: Threshold 20 marks

Does the proposal demonstrate a clear, coherent and credible plan for implementing the project and achieving its intended results?

- ✓ **Are the requested costs necessary and relevant to the project?** Demonstrate that the funding requested by each Partner is directly linked to its approved role, responsibilities and activities within the project and is necessary for achieving the proposed objectives and outputs.

  Applicants are encouraged to clearly establish the relationship between Activity, Partner, Required Cost and Relevant Output

- ✓ **Are the proposed results, outputs and outcomes clearly defined and appropriately captured in the Research and Impact Landing Roadmap? What is the potential for uptake and wider use of the project results?**

  The proposal should demonstrate that the expected results, outputs and outcomes are clearly defined and appropriately captured in the Research and Impact Landing Roadmap.

Baselines, targets, indicators/KPIs, measurement methods and verification sources should be sufficiently specific and appropriate to enable progress, uptake, impact and achievement to be monitored and assessed.

Explain how the principal project results are expected to be used, maintained, further developed, adopted, replicated and/or otherwise taken forward following completion of the project.

Applicants should identify the intended users of the results and, where applicable, consider their potential application beyond the immediate project setting.

The proposal should identify relevant conditions or barriers affecting future use, including, where appropriate, affordability, operating and maintenance requirements, technical capacity, infrastructure, further research or validation requirements, regulatory considerations and additional investment.

- ✓ **What additional value will the proposed funding generate?** Explain what additional research, development, validation and/or impact will be enabled through the funding requested under this Programme.

- ✓ **Are project risks and dependencies adequately managed?** Identify the principal scientific, technical, environmental, operational and administrative risks and dependencies that could affect successful implementation or the reliability of the project results. Mitigations and appropriate contingency measures, where adequate, should be presented. This may be presented as a table.

- ✓ **Are the proposed deliverables appropriate, sufficiently specific and measurable?**
  Do they provide meaningful evidence of progress and achievement throughout the project lifetime? Are the deliverables appropriately linked to the relevant activities and intended results?

- ✓ **Are the proposed milestones meaningful and appropriately defined?** Do they represent substantive scientific, technical or developmental achievements or decision points rather than routine project-management activities? Are the success criteria, means of verification, responsible partners, related work packages and timing clearly established?

- ✓ **Is the project structured into appropriate and logically sequenced work packages and activities, supported by a realistic and internally consistent timetable?**
  Are the work packages sufficiently defined in terms of their purpose, activities, outputs, milestones, responsibilities and timing, and do the work packages, activities, milestones, deliverables and Gantt chart demonstrate coherent sequencing, appropriate dependencies and sufficient time for the completion and validation of the planned work?

- ✓ **Are the key individuals appropriately identified, and their proposed roles clearly defined?**
  Does the expertise and relevant track record of the proposed personnel correspond to the responsibilities assigned to them within the project? Where key positions remain to be filled, is the required expertise appropriately specified?

- ✓ **Where collaborations are proposed, are they appropriately justified and structured?**
  Is the contribution of each collaborator clearly defined and relevant to the project activities and intended results? Does the proposed collaboration provide a clear contribution to the delivery of the project? Where no external collaborators are proposed, is this adequately justified in relation to the project requirements?

- ✓ **Has the proposal appropriately considered gender, ethical and legal considerations relevant to implementation?**
  Where applicable, are these considerations identified and adequately incorporated into the project design and implementation arrangements?

Other considerations:

If two or more projects obtain the same mark following evaluation, then Xjenza Malta shall give priority to that project which provides the best consideration to the implementation of gender equality in the research project.

12.2 Quality Approved Process

Should a proposal score **more that 80 marks** yet not be granted due to funds being consumed by higher ranked proposals, the proposal will receive a "**Quality Proposal**

Acknowledgment" (QPA). Using the QPA, the Managing Agency will seek further funding on behalf of the applicant. Please note that there is no guarantee that these funds will be secured in favour of the proposal. The applicant will be notified following the evaluation and ranking of all proposals if they receive a QPA.

The Managing Agency will have till the end of the applicable calendar year from the notification date to seek the funding requested and respond to the applicant. Should a project be granted further funding through this mechanism, The awarded process (Further evaluations, agreement, etc.) continue as regular. Should the window elapse, the project will not be successful and will not be granted funding. Should multiple proposals be provided with a QPA and insufficient funds provided to grant all QPA projects, the Managing Agency will respect the ranking devised through the evaluation process and award the next best ranked projects. Should a project receive funding but is rejected by the applicant for any reason, then the QPA mechanism no longer applies.

13 Post Selection Process

13.1 The Grant Agreement

Following the successful evaluation of the application, the beneficiary and any consortium partners (*if applicable*) will be invited to sign a Grant Agreement establishing the terms and conditions governing the financing of the project. The Grant Agreement will include the original project proposal as an annex. The beneficiary will be expected to execute the project in line with the original proposal. The Project Application, including but not limited to milestones, compliance and reporting obligations, as well as any relevant legal agreements, shall constitute an integral part of the Grant Agreement as will the applicable Rules for Participation.

Hard copies of the Grant Agreement must be signed by the beneficiary and any consortium partners (if applicable) and delivered to the Managing Agency within (fifteen) 15 days from the date of receipt by the Lead Partner. The Project Contact point must ensure that the respective legal representative/s are available to endorse the Grant Agreement within this 15-day timeframe, where a legal representative is not available a proxy should sign. Failure to endorse the Grant Agreement within the stipulated timeframe may result in a withdrawal of the offer for funding.

Together with the signed copies of the Grant Agreement, the Principal Investigator must provide an abstract of the project. This may be used, in-part or in-whole, by the Managing Agency and CRIHM to publicise or externalise the award of funds. **No proprietary intellectual property should be included in this draft.**

13.2 Start Date and End Date

The project will start on a pre-determined date as agreed by all the respective parties and as stipulated in the Grant Agreement.

The CRIHM will endeavour to transfer the first tranche of funding to the project account held by the Beneficiary as soon as possible after the Agreement Date, as described in the Grant Agreement.

Between the Agreement Date and the Start Date, the Beneficiary should ensure that all activities required for a smooth project start are completed. These may include but not limited to:

- ✓ obtaining quotations for procurement purposes
- ✓ issuing a human-resources call
- ✓ opening a bank account for the depositing of the first tranche (refer to section 14.4).

14 Funding, Management and Progress Monitoring

14.1 Allocation and Disbursement of Funding

The total financial contribution by the Managing Agency over the lifetime of the project shall not exceed the funding limit as established in the Grant Agreement, irrespective of actual expenditure.

Funding will be allocated according to the following schedule:

Tranche	Percentage (%)

Pre-Financing	50%
Interim Tranche	30%
Retention	20%

1. At the beginning of the project, the CRIHM will provide the relevant pre-financing to the Beneficiary, which amounts to 50% of the grant amount. This will include both direct and indirect eligible costs.

2. At the end of the first half of the project, all project beneficiaries are required to present an Interim Technical Report , Interim Financial Report and the Interim Research and Impact Landing Roadmap. All reports must be approved by the Managing Agency before proceeding with any disbursements. Once proved to be satisfactory the CRIHM will provide a further 30% of the grant amount mid-way through the project.

3. The remaining 20% of the grant value will make up the totality of the retention, which will be transferred by the CRIHM after successful completion of the project and once all deliverables are declared successful, complete and satisfactory by the Managing Agency, and following the presentation and acceptance of the Final Technical Report and the Final Audited Financial Report. An Audited Financial Report is to be presented by all partners in the Consortium, while the Final technical Report including the updated Research and Impact Landing Roadmap is only required from the Lead Beneficiary.

The Managing Agency reserves the right to alter the retention percentage in order to limit exposed risk, following a due diligence evaluation. Underspends are retrieved by the Managing Agency following the Final financial audited report. Typically, these are reduced from the retention amount though the Managing Agency reserves the right to request the return of additional funding that goes unspent. In the case of overpayment, the Beneficiary/ies will be required to refund the under-spent amount to the Managing Agency within a specific timeframe, or as agreed to with the Managing Agency.

14.2 Reporting & Audit

The Principal Investigator shall set a schedule for periodic progress meetings with the Managing Agency. During such meetings, the beneficiary should verbally update Xjenza Malta on progress via presentation, as indicated in Section 9.3.1.

As indicated in Section 9, the Principal Investigator will be required to submit an Interim Technical Report and a Final Technical Report. In case of a consortium, an Interim Financial Report and an Audited Final Financial report need to be submitted by every partner. Both Technical and Financial Reports should follow the template provided by the Managing Agency in the Grant Agreement.

All reports must be approved by the Managing Agency before proceeding with the issuing of the retention tranche.

The Interim Technical Report and the Interim Financial Reports should be submitted at the end of the first half of the project. The Final Technical Report and the Audited Final Financial Reports should be submitted at the end of the Project.

The Interim Financial Reports submitted should contain details of actual expenditure over the first half of the project compared with the originally submitted budgeted expenditure as well as an updated forecast of projected expenditure for the remaining half of the project.

The Interim Technical Report should detail the activities and achievements completed during the reporting period, measured against the original application and any annexes in the Grant Agreement defining the beneficiary's tasks and deliverables as well as an updated forecast of project activity and projected achievements for the remaining half of the project.

The Final Technical Report should provide the same comparison for the entire project period.

The Audited Final Financial Reports should include details of actual expenditure over the whole reporting period. All Audited Final Financial Reports are to be conducted by an appointed certified auditor, where the auditor is responsible for the financial audit and approved by the Managing Agency once submitted.

All financial reports must be signed by the person responsible for the financial management and assembled as per the instructions in the Grant Agreement.

The Managing Agency reserves the right to appoint an auditor to audit the Project Financial Audit as submitted. This audit should determine the total eligible costs, and it should be conducted to align with the Audit Checklist provided by the Managing Agency.

The End of Project Audited Financial Report must contain a detailed account of the actual expenditure disbursed for the entirety of project, including:

1. Accounts
2. Physical Inventory (Provided using the Inventory Checklist template)
3. Timesheets and Payslips/employee contracts
4. Receipts for all equipment and consumables
5. Bank statements for the Project Account

The End of Project Audited Financial Report shall be submitted up to eight (8) weeks from the stipulated end of project date.

The Managing Agency may at any time request supplementary information and documentation on the projects and may request additional progress meetings. The Managing Agency may make such additional enquiries into a project as deemed necessary. Any required documentation not submitted within Final Reports, or documentation not submitted within the specified timeframes, may render the whole project ineligible, and may result in the Managing Agency recovering all funds disbursed across the project.

If the project is found to be in breach of the Grant Agreement or to materially depart from the submitted application, the Managing Agency reserves the right to discontinue the award, and the beneficiary may be required to refund the Grant in part or in full. In any such event, the Managing Agency may also exclude a beneficiary from participating in future calls.

The Project beneficiary/ies must comply with the mandatory reporting requirements and activities as outlined in the Call text.

14.3 Transfer of Funds

Applicants should note that:

- *Transfers* of project funds between line items **over the duration of the project** that are **cumulatively less than 20% of the grant value are automatically eligible** provided that:

    i. the limits mentioned in the Rules of Participation in Section 9 are adhered to

    ii. expenses are exclusively used throughout the project lifetime to the sole benefit of the project

    iii. requested costs should be eligible as per Rules of Participation

- Should transfers of project funds between line items are **cumulatively greater than 20% of the grant value, these will be considered as significant alterations to the proposal and will not be eligible.**

Kindly note that with respect to transfer of project funds, these should be reflected in the project progress meetings and in the Project Audited Financial Report (both the interim and the audited final financial reports).

In case of consortia, the 20% transfer limit is set for the grant value of the respective partner.

Kindly note that the structure of the line items will be as follows:

- Transfers between different budget categories will always contribute to the 20% limit.

- Each **manager** will be considered as its own line item (transfers between managers will contribute to the 20% limit).

- **Research personnel** will be considered a single line item (transfers between research personnel will not contribute to the 20% limit).

- **Equipment** under €5,000 will be considered a single line item (transfers between equipment (under €5,000) will not contribute to the 20% limit). However, each piece of equipment over €5,000 will be considered their own line items (transfers between equipment (over €5,000) will contribute to the 20% limit).

- **Subcontracted activities** of under €5,000 will be considered a single line item (transfers between subcontracting (under €5,000) will not contribute to the 20% limit). However, subcontracting over €5,000 will be considered their own line items (transfers between subcontracting (over €5,000) will contribute to the 20% limit).

- **Consumables** of under €5,000 will be considered a single line item (transfers between consumables (under €5,000) will not contribute to the 20% limit). However, consumables over €5,000 will be considered their own line items (transfers between consumables (over €5,000) will contribute to the 20% limit).

- **Travel** will be considered a single line item (transfers between travel will not contribute to the 20% limit).

Kindly note that the term 'own line item' refers to a whole budget category whereas 'single line item' refers to one individual line item within a budget category.

Should equipment and/or subcontracting originally proposed to be over €5,000 but get reduced to less than €5,000 over the course of the project, this will still be considered as an individual line item. Should an item of equipment/subcontracting originally proposed to be less than €5,000, be increased to over €5,000 over the course of the project, this will alter to an individual line item.

For reference purposes, please find attached the above transfers in a tabular format:

Will contribute to the 20% limit	**Will not contribute to the 20% limit**
Transfers between different budget categories	
Transfers between managers	Transfers between research personnel
Transfers between items of equipment (over €5,000)	Transfers between items of equipment (under €5,000)

Transfers between subcontracted activities (over €5,000)	Transfers between subcontracted activities (under €5,000)
Transfers between consumables (over €5,000)	Transfers between consumables (under €5,000)
	Transfers between travel activities

14.4 Accountability

As a condition, the beneficiary/ies shall open a dedicated project bank account with a banking institution of repute, in the name of the Beneficiary, designated by the Project Grant Agreement Number, denominated in Euro. Grant payments by the Managing Agency, as well as any co-financing from Beneficiaries, shall be deposited into the Project Account. The Beneficiary shall only use this account for the payment of expenses incurred in connection with the Project, provided such expenses are authorised and allowed in terms of these Rules and the Grant Agreement. The Beneficiary shall not encumber the Project Account in any way whatsoever, and without limitation to the generality of the foregoing, the Grant shall not be made subject to any hypothec, pledge or any other form of security guarantee. Without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing provision, the following shall apply:

"The Managing Agency reserves the right to grant permission, in writing, to one or more Beneficiaries, to waive the obligations of said Beneficiary/s mentioned in Section 7. Provided that where the Managing Agency provides its written permission to one or more of the Beneficiaries to proceed without the opening of a Project Account, the Beneficiary/ies are to ensure that all Project transactions bear appropriate analysis codes to enable the clear distinction between Project transactions and other operational transactions. The Managing Agency reserves the right to order the refunding of any disbursed funds that have not been accounted for in this manner."

The Managing Agency reserves the right to order the refunding of any disbursed funds that have not been accounted for in the above manner. The Lead Beneficiary's Project Account, or bank account is to be used in accordance to this Article's provisions, is stated in the Grant Agreement.

Eligible expenses must have been determined in accordance with the usual accounting and management principles and practices of the Applicant. Direct eligible cost must be backed up with the relevant documentation as specified in the Grant Agreement.

14.5 Dissemination and Externalisation

All dissemination and publication of information in relation to the proposal selected for award is to commence following the signing of the Grant Agreement.

Any literature, articles and text material published in relation to the completion of tasks proposed in the project should include the words:

'Project <Project Name> financed by the Cancer Research and Innovation Hub Malta, and managed by Xjenza Malta through the 'R&I Thematic Programmes: Cancer Research Programme 2027'.

This acknowledgement will need to be included on any dissemination material submitted to the Managing Agency to be considered as fulfilling the obligations of the Grant Agreement. Dissemination related deliverables which do not have this acknowledgement will not be accepted.

In the case where printed material is published without a mention of the Cancer Research Programme, Xjenza Malta and the CRIHM, the Beneficiary shall be obliged to publish a correction at its own expense in the subsequent issue of the publication. This is also applicable for published material produced by persons who are not members of the entity or consortium. In the case where such publicity does not mention the Digital Innovation Programme, Xjenza Malta and the CRIHM, associated costs will be considered ineligible.

The Managing Agency reserves the right to request that the Beneficiary participates in any Research Conferences or Events to disseminate the project results and the experience in obtaining funding from the Managing Agency.

The Beneficiaries shall always cooperate with the Managing Agency in promoting the Programme by presenting the Awarded Project or through other reasonable means, as requested by the Managing Agency.

15 Supervening Circumstances

The Principal Investigator is obliged to immediately advise the Unit Director, of any internal or external significant event which might affect either the validity or the implementation of the project. This obligation applies to the entire period between the submission of the preliminary project application and the completion of the project.

The Managing Agency shall acknowledge receipt of the said notification within five (5) working days. The reply will either give such directives as it deems necessary for the furtherance on the project or re-assess the project in its entirety accordingly.

Failure on the part of the Principal Investigator to respect this obligation may be deemed by the Managing Agency to constitute material non-compliance on the part of the Beneficiary and the Managing Agency may, thereafter, take such action as is necessary in terms of the Grant Agreement in consequence of such non-compliance.

If during the course of a project a Partner withdraws from the Consortium (where applicable), the Lead Partner will immediately advise the Unit Director. Xjenza Malta shall then, at its own discretion, either gives such directives as it deems necessary for the reallocation of tasks among the remaining Partners or the nomination of a replacement Partner, for the furtherance on the project or re-assess the project in its entirety accordingly.

15.1 Default

Where the implementation of a project becomes impossible or implementation is not completed, the Managing Agency shall be entitled to take any action it deems necessary, including, but not limited to, the withdrawal of funding for the project and the collection of refunds of money already paid out. A similar course of action may be followed if a project is in default as a result of not meeting one or more of its obligations in terms of the grant agreement.

In the event of default on the part of one of the Partners, the Managing Agency may issue a written notice to the Lead Partner outlining the default, the corrective action to be taken and granting a rectification period of one month. The Managing Agency may also issue a second written notice of default granting a rectification period in respect of the same default.

16 Interpretation of Rules

This document endeavours to establish comprehensive and clear rules governing participation in this initiative. However, should circumstances arise where the rules are inadequate, unclear, ambiguous, or conflicting, the Managing Agency shall exercise its discretion in the interpretation of the rules or will extrapolate the rules as necessary through the setting up of an ad hoc committee. These current Rules repeal any Rules previously issued and constitute exclusively the entire Rules issued by the Managing Agency.

These current Rules repeal any Rules previously issued and constitute exclusively the entire Rules issued by the Managing Agency.

In the event of a conflict between the Grant Agreement and these Rules for Participation, the Grant Agreement shall take precedence.

APPENDIX 1

TECHNOLOGY READINESS LEVELS (TRLs)

Kindly make reference to the resource page 'Technology Readiness Levels Aid'