



Open Call

Guideline for EEN Sustainability Advisors



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Acronyms, Abbreviations & Terms

| Acronym | Definition |
|----------------------------|--|
| AP | Action Plan |
| EE | Energy Efficiency |
| EEN | Enterprise Europe Network |
| EU | European Union |
| SME | Small and Medium Enterprise |
| SMP | Single Market Programme |
| Client / EEN client | Any SME engaging with EEN and receiving advanced, tailored support by EEN advisors |

1 Introduction

This document provides guidance and information for **EEN Sustainability Advisors** who are supporting their clients with an application to the open call of the EENergy project, including information regarding the EENergy advisory process workflow, the responsibilities of the advisor, and the tools and support available to the sustainability advisors. It is strongly recommended that all sustainability advisors applicants read this document in its entirety in order to ensure they provide the most suitable support to their clients.

2 Open Call Description

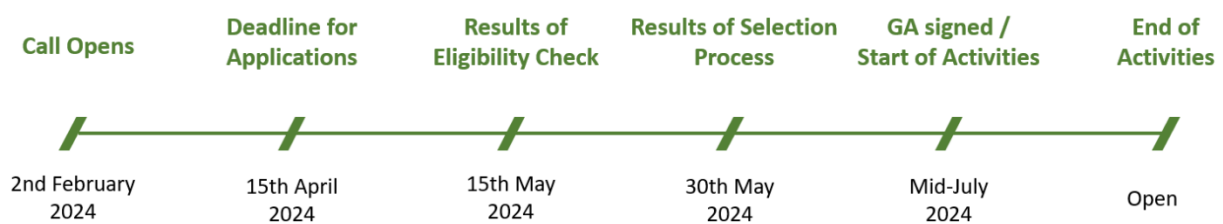


Figure 1: Expected timings for key milestones in the EENergy Open Call

The open call is open from 2nd February 2024 and will close on 15th April 2024 at 17:00 CET. The planned schedule of the call is shown in Figure 1. The sustainability advisor must complete all their advisory tasks (SME onboarding, assessment, action plan creation, and application confirmation) for the SME in sufficient time to allow the SME to complete their application before the call deadline. These tasks are described in more detail in section 2.2.

2.1 Eligible Activities

2.1.1 Financial Support to Selected Eligible SMEs

Financial support of up to **€10,000** will be allocated to the funded beneficiaries. These funds provided by EENergy must be used for the implementation of actions resulting in improved energy efficiency for the beneficiary SME. The contractual aim of the activities is to achieve a 5% reduction in energy consumption. These actions must fall within one or several of the following three categories:

A. Investment: This category covers the implementation, acquisition, purchase, and/or installation of new software, hardware, equipment, or other technologies. Some examples include:

- Contributions to the purchase and installation of renewable energy systems such as solar panels, wind turbines, invertors, storage systems or any other relevant equipment.
- The implementation of energy optimisation / management software on a production line.
- The replacement of an old boiler with a modern one using more efficient technologies.
- The replacement of outdated power supply units with modern and effective ones.

B. Consultancy: This category covers advisory & consultancy services related to the identification and implementation of energy efficiency improvements, as well as energy audits. Some examples include:

- Performing a detailed needs analysis for the SME beneficiary and defining a detailed investment roadmap for energy efficiency improvement.
- Performing a technical consultation to identify areas for energy efficiency improvement and suitable technologies on the market.
- Execution of an energy audit.

C. Skills & Training: This category covers access to trainings, courses, classes, and programs for education and upskilling of employees in energy efficiency topics. Some specific examples include:

- Training for employees on best practices, awareness, regulatory aspects, and behavioural change related to energy efficiency.
- Qualification of employees to become certified energy auditors.
- Training on energy efficiency technologies, digital tools for energy analysis.

A mixture of the activities across the three types is possible, with overall budgets larger than €10.000, but the overall grant funding to be provided will not exceed **€10,000 per SME**. Hence, an SME may either apply for financing 100% of an activity with a budget up to €10.000, or it may propose a larger activity with a larger budget, to be co-financed from alternative private sources.

2.1.2 Advisory Support to All Eligible SMEs

Independent of the financial support, all eligible applicants shall benefit from all EEN advisory services which support increased energy efficiency activity implementation. An innovative product will be offered to all eligible applicants/, including both funded and regular beneficiaries: the so-called “**benchmark reports**”. The application process for the program includes a detailed feedback mechanism that is activated following the submission of the application. Eligible applicants will receive a comprehensive report based on the information provided during the application stage. Moreover, in addition to this initial report, the firm will receive three additional follow up benchmark reports. To access these reports, the firm needs to provide further information with a focus on its energy consumption. These reports offer a comparative statistical analysis of the firm’s energy efficiency performance against others in the same size category, region, and industry. The analysis is tailored to provide insights into the firm’s position in relation to its peers, allowing to identify areas of strength and opportunities for improvement with the EEN advisors.

Sustainability advisors are requested to support the data collection and follow-up with their clients across three data collection periods, which will be a pre-requisite to receiving the benchmark reports. These reports will serve as an indication of improved energy efficiency performance of clients and hence may be used to demonstrate impact arising from the advisory services provided, **potentially qualifying these services to be registered as achievements.**

2.2 Sustainability Advisors / Client Interaction

The sustainability advisors play a critical role in the preparation of an eligible application, and clients will be partially dependent on their advisors to perform several key steps in the context of the EENergy application process (Figure 2).

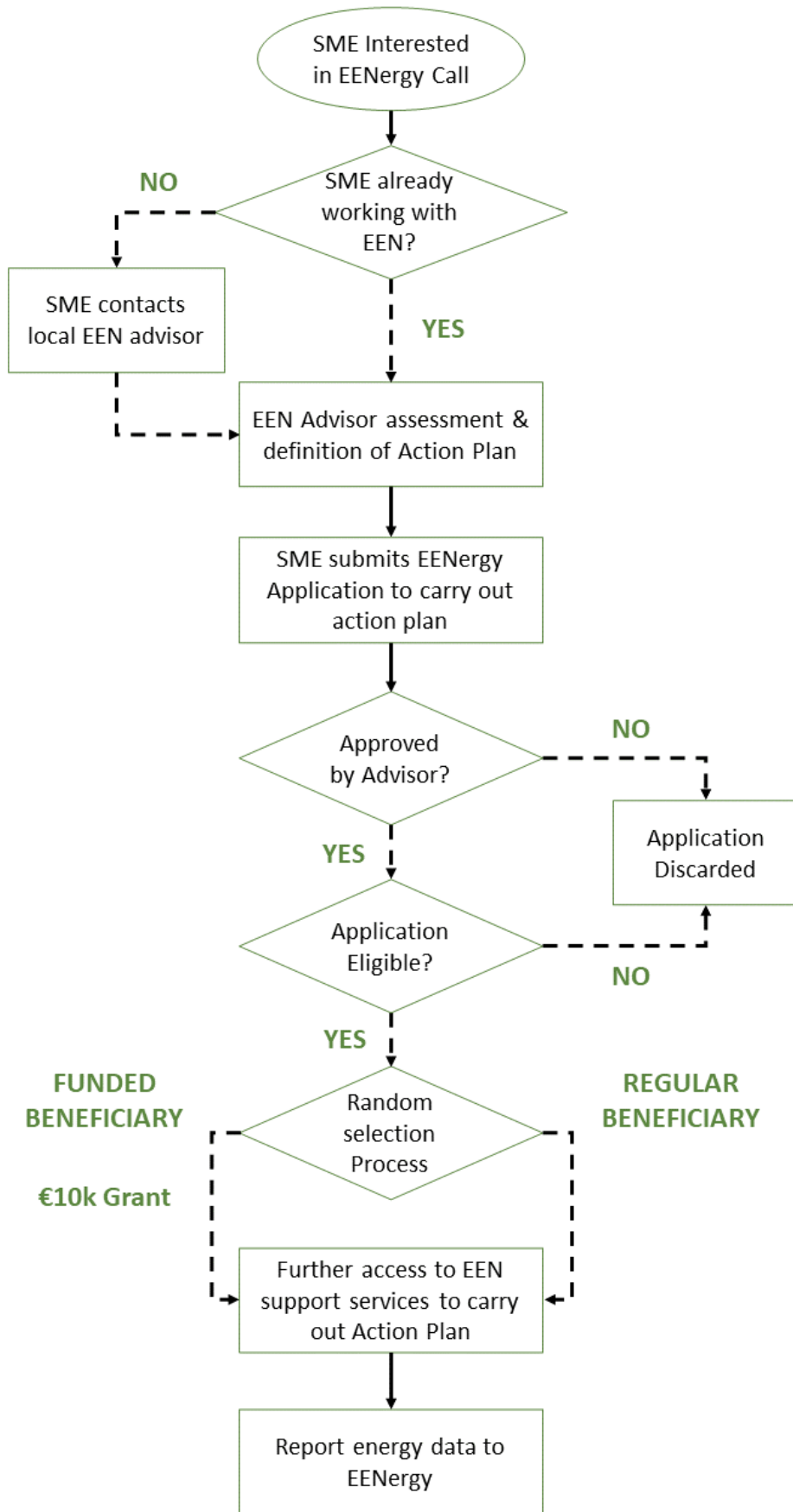


Figure 2: Overview of the overall process for the EENergy open call

Step 1: Acquisition of EENergy clients. The EENergy open call is open to any SME located in countries participating in the EU's Single Market Programme (SMP), which has been incorporated and operational since before 01.01.2023¹. Both existing EEN clients, as well as SMEs not yet engaged with the EEN, are eligible to participate. Client mobilisation by EEN Sustainability Advisors will be key in order to reach the targeted minimum number of 1800 eligible applicants, and advisors are encouraged to mobilise both their existing EEN clients, as well as reaching new SMEs in their region. In particular, SMEs active in Energy Intensive Industries should be targeted. EENergy aims to reach an applicant group with the following characteristics:

- 1800 + eligible applicants.
- At least 2% of applicants are represented by each SMP country.
- At least 20% of applicants are active in Energy Intensive Industries.

As with any other suitable financing opportunity, sustainability advisors should introduce EENergy to potential clients, explain to the clients what the call requires and how the project will work, and, if the client is interested, move forward with the next steps.

Several new clients are expected to be recruited by EEN through outreach efforts of the EENergy consortium and the wider EEN community. In these instances, SMEs will approach their local EEN consortia through the publicly listed local contact points.² SMEs from Liechtenstein and Moldova, as participants of the SMP, are eligible for the EENergy open call, but have no EEN organisation in their region. Any such interested SMEs will be encouraged to contact their nearest EEN organisation to access support services. **In these instances, EEN advisors are expected to support these clients for the purposes of EENergy and this support will be eligible for advisory achievements as normal.**

Step 2: Company assessment and drafting of action plan. The main role of the EEN Sustainability advisors is to support the applying SME to define and initiate an **action plan** to enhance its energy efficiency with the goal of an improvement of at least 5%. The advisors will support clients in their energy transition by, performing a needs analysis, identifying key targets for increased energy efficiency, and providing advice on suitable energy efficiency measures to be deployed. Together with the client, the EEN sustainability advisor will discuss the economic and strategic context for the action. The support service consists nominally of three steps:

1. The EEN sustainability advisor shall arrange a kick-off meeting with the interested SME, either on-site or remotely, allowing the advisor to perform an initial needs assessment, as well as to collect key data required for performing the complete general client intake process including the energy efficiency assessment and the design of the action plan accordingly. To support this diagnosis, a dedicated assessment tool has been prepared for use by the sustainability advisors. This tool is available for download³, but its use is not mandatory.
2. The EEN sustainability advisor will analyse the data collected along with the other information learned and gathered during the initial meeting, in order to perform the assessment of the company's energy efficiency needs.
3. The EEN sustainability advisor will report the outcomes of their analysis to the SME and discuss the learnings and conclusions. These results will be used to draft the action plan for the SME which will provide the content for the application. Specific guidelines and examples for the content of the action plan will be established within the EENergy toolset for sustainability

¹ This restriction ensures that SMEs have a baseline energy consumption performance period of at least 1 calendar year, necessary to fulfil the approach of the open call.

² <https://een.ec.europa.eu/local-contact-points>

³ <https://www.een-ara.fr/form-download-assessment-tool-een-sustainable-advisors-within-eenergy-programme>

advisors, in order to ensure an action plan which covers qualified and reliable approaches. For example, the action plan may consist of solutions or technologies specified within the EEN catalogue of EE measures⁴.

This mandatory assessment and action plan will be a **pre-requisite** for each application. Through the drafting of the action plan as an obligatory entry condition, every SME will benefit from an individual assessment, leading to further support measures for the applicant's benefit which can be derived and implemented. This individual action plan will cover business and innovation support and access to existing alternative funds beyond the EENergy open call. The content of the action plan will be the basis for the client's EENergy application.

Step 3: Confirmation and documentation of Action Plans. After the submission of the application, and in order for an SME's application to be formally checked for eligibility, the sustainability advisor must confirm they have supported the applying SME to develop an action plan. This is achieved through an automatic email-based notification system. The SME must provide the name and email of their sustainability advisor in the application form. After submission, the named sustainability advisor will receive an automated email to this address asking them to confirm whether (or not) that the SME in question has been supported in developing an action plan with the advisor. This serves as a check to ensure only those clients who have worked with their EEN advisor on an action plan are considered in the next steps of the process. The **sustainability advisor must approve the application** by clicking on the relevant link in the email. Only when this has been confirmed by the sustainability advisor, via the link shared in the automated email, will the application be officially submitted for eligibility approval. The SME's programme application will not be officially considered as submitted until this confirmation has been declared by the sustainability advisor. **It is therefore critical that all sustainability advisors are diligent in ensuring they approve their client's applications.** In addition, as with any other action plan, **the sustainability advisor must upload the action plan in EEN CONNECT** (although this step is not directly linked to the application processing by EENergy).

Step 4: Continued advisory services. Following the submission of the application, at least 900 applicants will be randomly selected to receive the €10.000 grant to finance the implementation of their action plan. Regardless of the selection outcome, **sustainability advisors should continue to support their clients with the implementation of their action plan.** In the case of funded beneficiaries, this may take the form of continued advisory support during the performance of the activities and continued identification of further energy efficiency improvement opportunities. **Clients that receive the €10.000 grant will be eligible for reporting as an advisory achievement.** In the cases of regular (non-funded) beneficiaries, this support may take the form of identification of alternative sources of financing for the action plan, or further sustainability advice in other areas of the client's business.

Step 5: Support in benchmarking and capturing progress over time and across SMEs. Information for the benchmarking reports will be collected with the support of EEN advisors, allowing them to identify the performance of the SMEs they support over time. The first benchmarking report will be produced following the closure of the open call using the data provided at the application stage. Subsequent reports (requesting the same, objective and comparable information as is being provided at the application stage) are planned for January 2025, July 2025, and January 2025. These benchmarking reports will support the sustainability advisor and the respective supported SME to identify where additional support may be needed by providing comparisons to aggregated anonymous information on similar firms in the same sector/region/size. An improvement in key outcomes related to energy efficiency (over time) can be used as supporting, suggestive evidence towards sustainability advisors' contribution to an improvement for the SMEs. **In this sense, a correlation between continued advisory**

⁴ EEN EE Catalogue: https://een.ec.europa.eu/system/files/documents/2023-06/EEN_Catalogue_Energy_Solutions_1_2023.pdf

support and energy efficiency improvements according to the benchmark studies may qualify as an advisory achievement for the sustainability advisor under the standard performance measurement rules of EEN (KPI3 – achievements). The sustainability advisors will be supported, via relevant consortia and the World Bank team, to ensure that all programme beneficiaries participate in these data collection activities. Provision of the data by each SMEs is a pre-requisite to receive the tailored benchmarking report.

To summarise, the EEN sustainability advisor will for all eligible applicants:

- Implement a sustainability assessment on the applying SME to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the SME, that will lead to the definition of a tailor-made action plan.
- Promote the EENergy grant scheme as well as other suitable Energy Efficiency funding opportunities.
- Confirm, via an email link, that an applying SME has been supported by the sustainability advisor to develop a relevant action plan.
- Support the SME through the execution of the action plan along the project and, if necessary, support the SME to identify alternative and additional sources of funding for the implementation of the action plan.
- Link its client SME to third party experts that could support them in the implementation of the different actions defined in their action plan.
- Support data collection efforts and discuss benchmark reports following the application stage and further data collection efforts in January 2025, July 2025, and January 2026.

2.3 Eligibility Criteria

The EENergy open call is open to any legal entity which fulfils the following criteria:

- It is established and operational in one of the countries participating in the EU's single market program which includes:
 - The EU member states⁵.
 - The SMP COSME Strand: **Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway**
 - EU Acceding countries, candidate countries, potential candidates, and European Neighbourhood Policy Countries which participate in the SMP: **Bosnia & Herzegovina, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Türkiye, and Ukraine.**
- It is an SME as described by the European Commission Recommendation 2003/361/EC⁶, and the SME user guide,⁷ the main considerations being that the legal entity:
 - Is an enterprise, i.e., engaged in an economic activity,
AND
 - Has a staff headcount of less than 250 full-time equivalents,
AND
 - Has an annual turnover of €50 Million or less,
OR
 - Has a balance sheet total of €43 Million or less,

⁵ Applicants from Hungary are nominally eligible, but should take extra care to ensure they are not excluded for funding on the basis of European Council Implementing Decision 2022/2506

⁶ European Commission Recommendation 2003/361/EC.

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2003:124:0036:0041:en:PDF>

⁷ SME definition: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/756d9260-ee54-11ea-991b-01aa75ed71a1>

For any non-independent entities (i.e., those with a shareholding in other enterprises, or those that have other enterprises within their own shareholding structure), the above criteria must be assessed according to the methodology set out in the SME user guide.

- It was incorporated before the 01.01.2023.
- It has and provides a valid VAT number or registration number.
- It is engaged with the Enterprise Europe Network and has developed an EENergy Action Plan together with an EEN Sustainability Advisor that is referenced in the application form.
 - **New EEN clients, i.e., those who have not previously worked with the EEN are also eligible and encouraged.** For these interested SMEs that are currently not in the Enterprise Europe Network, please find and contact the local contact point in your country/region at the following link: <https://een.ec.europa.eu/local-contact-points>.
- It is not in financial difficulty, bankrupt, in a liquidation or winding up process, having its affairs administered by courts, or any similar situation according to the Commission Regulation No 651/2014, art. 2.18.
- It is not excluded from the possibility of obtaining EU funding under the provisions of both national and EU law, or by a decision of both national or EU authority.
- It has fully filled-in the application form where applicable.
- It agrees to provide information for follow-up data collections to support the impact assessment study.

2.4 Support & Help

A list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) is available on the grant platform website at <https://eenergy.grantplatform.com/>. Should advisors have any questions or queries related to the advisory process, the application process, the eligibility check, the selection process, or other details related to the open call, they are requested to first review the FAQ list. This list will be continuously updated during the call opening period with any other FAQs.

If the applicant's query is not covered within the FAQ list, a dedicated helpdesk is available for any other questions. Applicants can reach the call helpdesk through the email address: EENergy@lic.lt. A dedicated helpdesk team will monitor all communications to this address and either answer queries directly or connect enquiries with appropriate contact people from the EENergy consortium or the EEN.

3 Selection Process

All applications which are deemed eligible will be subject to a selection process through which the funded beneficiary and regular beneficiary SMEs will be selected. A stratified randomization will be used for the selection, based on an eligible pool that shall reflect the following characteristics (to as great an extent as possible):

- At least 20% of the beneficiaries are active in energy intensive industries.
- Ideally, at least 2% of the beneficiaries are selected from each of the 39 eligible countries (corresponding to at least 18 SMEs per country).
- Ideally, at least 50% of the beneficiaries will undertake business process innovation tied to technological adoption as part of their AP.
- Ideally, at least 25% of beneficiaries will enhance their digital skills as part of their AP.
- Ideally, at least 50% of beneficiaries will enhance the sustainability of their overall business model as part of their AP.

Given that these characteristics are initially fulfilled from the make-up of the pool of eligible applicants, then the selection will be performed via a randomised lottery with all applicants being treated equally within the same strata. Furthermore, the randomisation will aim to ensure statistically similarity between the funded and regular beneficiary groups according to these criteria.

In order to fairly distribute the available resources and to facilitate the impact evaluation study, the final eligible group of applicants will be (nominally) randomly split into 50% funded beneficiaries and 50% regular beneficiaries, whereas if more than 1800 eligible applications are received, the regular beneficiary group will contain more SMEs. **Example:** 2,400 eligible applications in total are received, and each applicant applies for the full €10,000 grant. It is ensured (through targeted mobilization) that the group contains 20% of SMEs from energy intensive industries. The statistical software will be programmed to ensure that 900 eligible applicants will be randomly selected to be funded beneficiaries, and 1,500 will remain regular beneficiaries. Given that the allocation is random, the two groups are on average, comparable, i.e., in terms of each group's share of energy intensive SMEs or other relevant characteristics described above.

4 Administrative & Financial Details

4.1 Conflict of Interest

All EEN advisors must take all measures to prevent any situation where the impartial and objective implementation of the activities is compromised for reasons involving economic interest, political or national affinity, family or emotional ties or any other shared interest ('conflict of interests'). All potential conflicts of interest will be assessed carefully. More information can be found in the EU's guide to addressing conflicts of interest.⁸ All advisors must formally notify the EENergy consortium without delay of any situation constituting or likely to lead to a conflict of interest and immediately take all the necessary steps to rectify this situation. The EENergy consortium may verify that the measures taken are appropriate and may require additional measures to be taken by a specified deadline.

4.2 Double Funding

Double funding is defined as **the use of two separate *public* funding sources for the same activity**. It is strictly prohibited. The funds provided by EENergy may be used as a contribution to an overall larger investment, provided that the remaining funds for the investment come from the company's own resources. To illustrate this, we take the following example:

A company wishes to invest in a new piece of equipment for their production line which should reduce the energy consumption of the line by an estimated 7%. The new piece of equipment will cost €30.000 (VAT exclusive) to purchase and install.

Three example scenarios are set forth:

⁸ https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/protection-eu-budget/conflict-interest_en

Case 1: The company receives €10.000 from the EENergy Open Call 1 and uses this, along with €20.000 of its own capital, to purchase the new equipment -> **ELIGIBLE**

Case 2: The company receives €10.000 from the EENergy Open Call 1 and uses this, along with a €20.000 from a private bank, to purchase the new equipment -> **ELIGIBLE**

Case 3: The company receives €10.000 from the EENergy Open Call 1. Meanwhile, the company has also received €20.000 grant funding from a public regional/national/other EU program to support energy efficiency increases. The company uses both sets of funds to purchase the new equipment and both funds contribute to the activity defined within the EENergy scope. -> **DOUBLE FUNDING, NON-ELIGIBLE**

Case 4: The company receives €10.000 from the EENergy Open Call 1. Meanwhile, the company is carrying out an R&D or innovation project funded by a public grant programme which foresees the procurement of this new piece of equipment. The company uses the €10.000 from EENergy together with funding from the regional/ national/ EU project to purchase the same new equipment new equipment and both funds contribute to the activity defined within the EENergy scope. -> **DOUBLE FUNDING, NON-ELIGIBLE**

In cases 1 & 2, should a funded beneficiary not be able to provide the remaining funds originally planned, and hence not carry out the planned investment within the planned timeframe, the funds will be considered either unused or improperly used and hence subject to return to the EENergy consortium. In case of any doubts regarding possible double funding, applicants are encouraged to seek clarification with the EENergy help desk.

Nota Bene: Consecutive funding applications, e.g., tax return measures for R&D investments, are ineligible on direct grants received under EENergy.

4.3 Non-Eligible Costs

The funds provided by EENergy must be used exclusively for the activities set out in the application, to purchase/pay for equipment/services/courses provided by external third parties. For the avoidance of doubt, a non-exhaustive list of non-eligible costs is provided here:

- Any internal company costs including:
 - Salaries and wages
 - Internally invoiced goods & services
 - Beneficiary costs associated with the implementation of the activities or the gathering of data for reporting purposes
 - Overhead
 - Taxes on company operations (e.g., corporation tax)
- External Taxes (e.g., VAT)
- Equipment depreciation cannot be included as part of the activity budget
- Travel costs
- Attendance to conferences or trade shows
- Reverse leasing

4.4 Other Legal and Liability Information

For the selected funded beneficiaries, the Agreement will include the set of obligations towards the EENergy consortium, for example: promoting the project and giving visibility to the EU funding; understanding potential controls and audits organised by the EENergy Consortium. The EENergy consortium will carry out audits of funded beneficiaries, selected at random, to ensure proper usage of funds and reporting of data. In case data is found to have been misreported, or the provided funds have been used improperly, the expenditures will be deemed ineligible, and any provided funds must be returned. In order to carry out these audits, the funded beneficiary shall ensure that the EENergy consortium and any external body(ies) authorised by it have on-the-spot access at all reasonable times, notably to the funded beneficiary offices, to its computer data, energy data, to its accounting data and to all the information needed to carry out those audits. They shall ensure that the information is readily available on the spot at the moment of the audit and, if so requested, that data be handed over in an appropriate form. On the basis of the conclusions of the audit, the EENergy consortium can take all appropriate measures which it considers necessary, including the issuing of recovery orders regarding all or part of the payments made by EENergy to the company in question and the application of any applicable sanction to do so.

The EENergy consortium cannot be held liable for any acts or omission of the applicant in relation to the selected activity implemented by the funded beneficiary. The EENergy consortium shall not be liable for any defaults of any expenditures associated with the activity, including, for instance, anomalies in the functioning or performance thereof. Funded beneficiaries shall bear sole responsibility for ensuring that their acts within the framework of their activities do not infringe third parties' rights.

The EENergy Consortium might cancel the call at any time, change its provisions or extend it. In such a case we will inform all applicants about the change.

Any matters not covered by this Guide will be governed by Danish law and rules related to the Single Market Programme and EU grants.

5 Checklist

All advisors accompanying applying SMEs are strongly encouraged to read the following points and ensure all points are properly addressed ahead of application submission.

- ✓ **Have you formulated an action plan for your client?** The existence of an EEN-formulated action plan is a pre-requisite for the submission of an application. Applicants without an action plan will not be considered for selection.
- ✓ **Do the planned activities fall entirely within the three eligible cost categories?** All EENergy actions must fall within the three categories described in section 2.1: Investment, Consultancy, or Skills and training.
- ✓ **Is there a clear reasoning to achieve the 5% or greater energy reduction target?** Applications must present a clear rationale for how the planned activities can achieve the energy reduction of 5% or more, either as a direct result of their implementation (e.g., replacement of equipment with more efficient hardware), or through secondary effects (e.g., overall energy reduction resulting from implementation new employee skills gained during upskilling programs).

- ✓ **Is your client's application complete?** Have they completed every section of the proposal and provided all the information requested? Applications which are missing any of this information (incl. the request for information to be uploaded) will be deemed ineligible.
- ✓ **Has your client submitted their application through the official grant management platform?** Only applications received through the official platform will be considered for selection. Applications received by other means will be deemed ineligible.
- ✓ **Has your client submitted their application before the deadline?** The grant management platform will close at the time and date of the call deadline. Any applications received after the deadline will be deemed ineligible.
- ✓ **Have you approved your clients' application?** It is the responsibility of the sustainability advisor to approve the client's application for it to be considered in the evaluation procedure. Please make sure that you are aware of this obligation, and that you approve the application before the deadline, to avoid disappointment.