



FUTURAL

Empowering the **FUT**ure through innovative Smart
Solutions for **rUR**AL areas

Open Call for co-creating SS with rural communities

Call for Evaluators



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

1.1 About FUTURAL project

FUTURAL will prototype, test, pilot and demonstrate community-led social, technological and business innovations, through co-creation in **six (6) Multi-Actor Pilots (MAPs)** across the EU, varying in geographical and socio-cultural contexts (including among others the island of Kythera, one of the Smart Rural 21 smart villages also announced as a model smart rural area by Ursula von der Leyen in the recent Rural Pact conference) by paying specific attention to the needs of women, youth, and vulnerable groups. For this, a set of **eight (8) digital Smart Solutions (SS)** will be developed and deployed, addressing key societal and environmental rural challenges relating to **five (5) Smart Solution domains**, not yet adequately addressed by other projects or initiatives, namely: **1. Circular Bioeconomy, Biodiversity and Ecosystem Management, 2. Resilience to Shocks, 3. Citizen Engagement and Quality of Life, 4. Lifelong Education and Training, and 5. Climate Adaptation and Mitigation**, covering a wide range of relevant challenges faced by rural communities across the EU. The SS will be accessible through an integrated **Metasearch Platform**, which will also incorporate solutions from other projects and initiatives.

FUTURAL's pathway to innovation will be paved through joint actions and governance schemes following an interdisciplinary and multi-actor approach. A networking strategy will enable links with relevant organisations, networks, projects, initiatives, and Smart Villages to ensure the active engagement of rural communities for societal change. Through an **Open Call (OC)**, **at least 10 additional projects will be funded** to develop their own digital SS based on the 5 domains to be applied in other European rural regions beyond the current consortium coverage. New **Business Models** will be developed and tested through experimentation and co-creation with users in rural communities and good practices for more resilient and sustainable smart rural areas will support evidence-based governance frameworks and policy making towards scaling up the FUTURAL innovations at the EU level.

Six (6) MAPs will be established across Europe to engage rural stakeholders in participatory activities for a bottom-up co-creation of innovations. Based on the five (5) FUTURAL domains, social, technological, and business innovations will be prototyped, tested, piloted, and demonstrated in six (6) MAPs in rural areas in the EU representing various contexts in terms of location, population, and challenges. The FUTURAL SS provided per MAP have been selected to match the challenges of each MAP reported at the proposal preparation stage as well as their diverse geographical attributes:

Table 1: SMART SOLUTIONS in MAPs

Domains	SMART SOLUTIONS	MAPs
Circular Bioeconomy, Biodiversity and Ecosystem Management	* An online circular bioeconomy platform to support exchange and upcycling of food, biomass and building materials. * A digital biodiversity status assessment tool (mobile application supporting visualisation and feedback).	Pongau, Austria / Jonava, Lithuania
Climate Adaptation and Mitigation	* An online platform to deliver hydrological models for water monitoring and promoting the implementation and testing of localised Natural-Based Solutions (NBS) strategies.	Westhoek (Flanders), Belgium / Birda, Romania / Kythira, Greece
Resilience to Shocks	* An online crowdsensing platform monitoring and visualising the structural health of bridges, road networks and buildings with an early warning system to detect when normal health values are exceeded.	Pongau, Austria / Durangaldea, Spain
Citizen engagement and quality of life	* An online platform to engage rural citizens in eGovernment plans and policy co-creation. * An online platform for policy makers, stakeholders and agencies to evaluate a rural area's accessibility to infrastructural, health, and social services. * An online platform to allow crowdsourcing reports from residents and visitors to simplify clearance and management of the trails.	Westhoek (Flanders), Belgium / Durangaldea, Spain / Kythira, Greece / Jonava, Lithuania
Lifelong Education and Training	* An online platform delivering open courses tailored to the needs of rural communities.	Birda, Romania / Kythira, Greece

- **FUTURAL Open Call**

FUTURAL will launch one (1) single Open Call providing Financial Support to Third Parties, to:

- Encourage SMEs and other interested parties (startups and research organisations) to develop and apply their own smart solutions increasing the number of SS available to rural communities within the five (5) FUTURAL domains:
- ◆ Circular bioeconomy, biodiversity and ecosystem management
 - ◆ Resilience to shocks
 - ◆ Citizen Engagement and Quality of Life
 - ◆ Lifelong Education and Training
 - ◆ Climate Adaptation and Mitigation

The sub-projects performed by the selected Consortia will have an implementation timeframe of **12 months** (until May 2026). The 12-month implementation period will be divided into **3 phases**:

- Phase 1 – Design [Deliverable: Activity plan] (June 2025 – September 2025)
- Phase 2 - Development [Deliverable: Digital smart solution demonstration] (October 2025 – February 2026)
- Phase 3 - Validation [Deliverable: Report on market or community associated activities] (March 2026 – May 2026)

Targeted applicants:

The consortia will be composed of 2-4 partners:

- ≥1 (at least one) technical party
- ≥1 (at least one) rural community

Examples of technical partners: SMEs, startups, research organisations etc.

Examples of rural communities: Municipalities, Regional authorities, Development agencies, NGOs etc.

- **Key numbers and date of the Open Call**

- **Total Open Call budget:** 1.2 million
- **Budget per sub-project:** €60,000 - €120,000
- **Budget per partner of the consortium:** €30,000 - €60,000

Submission timeline of the Open Call for the proposals: June 28th, 2024 – September 30th, 2024.

- **Open Call Hub platform**



Open Call Hub (OCH) is a digital platform for application management for financial support to third parties and accelerator programs, developed and maintained by Foodscale Hub. The FUTURAL open call for financial support to third parties (FSTP) will be published through Open Call Hub.

- **We are looking for evaluators!**

- **Evaluators profile**

We are looking for independent evaluators, who will be able to assess the quality of applications received within the FUTURAL Open Call, shortly after its closure.

Evaluators must be:

- European - EU nationals Member States (MS) of the European Union (EU), including their outermost regions, as well as Overseas Countries and Territories (OCT) linked to an EU Member as well as nationals of Horizon Europe associated countries, full list here).
- Experienced in technical and/or business expertise related to the topics of the call and knowledge surrounding Circular Bioeconomy, Biodiversity and Ecosystem Management, Resilience to Shocks, Citizen Engagement and Quality of Life, Lifelong Education and Training, and Climate Adaptation and Mitigation.
- Experienced in evaluating EC proposals or similar experience.

An evaluator should not work for an organisation that aims to apply for the FUTURAL Open Call, nor in an organisation participating in the FUTURAL consortium.

All evaluators must declare beforehand any known conflicts of interest and must immediately inform the FUTURAL Consortium staff if they detect a conflict of interest during the evaluation. The evaluator's contract also requires evaluators to maintain strict confidentiality with respect to the whole evaluation process.

They must follow any instruction given by the FUTURAL Consortium to ensure this. Under no circumstance may an evaluator attempt to contact an applicant on his/her own account, during the evaluation process. Confidentiality rules must be adhered to at all times before, during and after the evaluation. All external evaluators will sign a confidentiality declaration.

All evaluators must adhere to the guiding principles for independent experts set out by the EC including independence, impartiality, objectivity, accuracy and consistency.

The evaluators will be in charge of providing a neutral yet technical/scientific review of the received applications on the following aspects:

- Concept and feasibility
- Technology readiness and innovation development
- Impact & Exploitation
- Organisational capacity and sufficiency in the team's background.

The full evaluation criteria of the open call are specified in the respective open call kit documents. In addition, the kit will be part of the evaluators' manual. The evaluation process per application as well as specific reimbursement of evaluators' efforts will be listed. It is important to note that the number of applications per evaluator depends on several factors: the time availability of the evaluators, the number of submitted applications, and the number of evaluators to be selected throughout the open call.

● **Financial Benefits**

In the case of the FUTURAL project, external evaluators will participate in consortia selection. The evaluators daily rate amounts to 450€ and is based upon the EC rules. Two evaluators will be assigned to each proposal, with a projected capacity of **2 proposal evaluations per day**.

Payment will be done in Euros by bank transfer on the personal account of the evaluators, up to 60 days after submission of the evaluations and reception of an invoice from the evaluator.

The minimum and maximum number of days per evaluator will depend on the number of applications received, and other factors such as availability of the evaluator throughout the process etc.

- **Evaluation procedure**

All the activities will be performed individually on the Open Call Hub (OCH) platform; no physical meetings are planned. The evaluation process will start with a short briefing telco about the evaluation procedure with a special focus on the evaluation criteria. Then each proposal will be assigned to 2 evaluators and therefore for each proposal 2 individual evaluation reports will be written.

In evaluating proposals, it's crucial for the evaluators to provide detailed comments for each criterion, explaining the rationale behind the given score. The comments should align with and justify the scores given, ensuring consistency and clarity in the evaluation process.

After completing their evaluation, each pair of evaluators will have to consolidate their evaluations in one report ensuring that they reach a mutual agreement on the proposal's merits.

The process will be monitored and facilitated by the OC manager. This collaborative process ensures consistency in judgement and guards against bias, ultimately leading to the selection of the most deserving proposals. The effort of consolidation is included in the overall fee per proposal (€225) and is not reimbursed separately.

In case the difference in scores between evaluators is significant (>5) a consensus meeting between the two evaluators will be held to seek adjustments. In case the consensus meeting is unsuccessful, an online interview of the applicant by the external evaluators (a third external evaluator) will be conducted. The following criteria will be evaluated:

- (i) confirmation of proposed solution (40%);
- (ii) acceptance of the solution from the rural communities (30%);
- (iii) reliability to successfully complete the project (30%).

- **Evaluators selection process**

Evaluators will be selected by the FUTURAL OC Advisory Board based on their competences and needs of the open call.

- **Expression of interest**

If you are interested in being an evaluator, create an evaluator profile on the Open Call Hub, fill in all necessary fields and upload your CV (as .pdf) - the application shouldn't take you more than 5 minutes!

Apply [here](#):

Please **register as an evaluator** by checking the relative option.



If you know someone else who might be qualified for this task and might be interested, please forward this to him or her. By applying to FUTURAL Call for Evaluators, applicants automatically accept all the rules and conditions described below.

- **Tentative timeline of activities for Open Call***

FUTURAL Open Call duration for evaluators: June 28th– July 31st, 2024.

Eligibility check of the received evaluators' applications: August 26th – September 15th, 2024.

Contracting with selected evaluators: September 16th– October 15th, 2024.

Evaluation of Open Call proposals by the external evaluators: November 1st – December 31st, 2024

**Dates may be revised/ amended, subject to approval by EC services.*

- **Evaluators' liability**

All evaluators will be required to sign a declaration of no conflict of interest and non-disclosure agreement with the FUTURAL consortium prior to the evaluation start.

By applying to the FUTURAL Call for evaluators and registration to the Open Call Hub platform, the expert:

- understands that submitting an application (registration) does not guarantee his/her selection as an evaluator for any of the open calls.
- understands that he/she will have to provide a signed Code of Conduct and Declaration of Honor (DoH) along with any other requested documents if he/she is selected to serve as an evaluator for a specific open call published on the OCH platform.
- confirms that the team in charge for each Open Call will ask him/her on an open call basis about time availability to accomplish the evaluation within the specified time frame for the given open call, to attend a briefing session (if required) and a debriefing session after the selection (if required). Timing will be provided for every open call.
- confirms the interest to be informed about the future opportunities to act as an evaluator on ongoing and upcoming open calls that will be conducted on OCH.
- assures that he/she will only evaluate the applications of applicants for whom she/he does not have a Conflict of Interest (CoI).

- **Admissibility**

- The applicant must be a European (EU nationals (Member States (MS) of the European Union (EU), including their outermost regions, as well as Overseas Countries and Territories (OCT) linked to EU Member) as well as nationals of Horizon Europe associated countries, full list [HERE](#)) (Note: if you are not a citizen of these

countries, but a resident/taxpayer in one of these countries, you are still eligible to become an evaluator).

- **Applications can be submitted at any time starting from June 28th, 2024, and they should be submitted before July 31st, 2024.**
- Applications must be submitted electronically via Open Call Hub electronic submission system as indicated in this call, using the form provided inside OCH, and a CV, as .pdf, must be attached as part of the application. Paper or email submissions are NOT possible.
- Applications must be complete for all parts, and CV should be readable, accessible and printable.

If the admissibility criteria are respected, then the evaluation of the expert will be performed by the Advisory Board or expert team of each project whose Open Call is conducted via OCH platform. To formalise the collaboration, if not specified differently, a service contract will be signed between Foodscale Hub and the evaluators.

All selected evaluators will be required to sign a declaration of no conflict of interest and non-disclosure agreement with the representative of each project (coordinator, treasurer, etc.) prior to the evaluation start.

By applying for evaluators, interested applicants automatically accept the Guidelines in this Call for Evaluators and all the guidelines and requirements emerging from documentation included in the Open Call kit.

- **Conflict of interest**

Evaluators must not have a conflict of interest at the time of their appointment and must sign a contract with a declaration that no such conflict exists. They also must inform the consortium should such a conflict arise in any of the applications they have been assigned. When a potential conflict of interest is reported by the evaluator or brought to the attention of the consortium by any means, the project consortium will analyse the circumstances and any objective elements of information available. If the consortium concludes that there is conflict of interest, the evaluator will be excluded from the evaluation of that application. All potential conflicts of interest will be assessed carefully. Please see more info *here*.

- **Confidentiality**

Evaluators are bound by confidentiality, as all information relating to the assessment process is strictly confidential. They are not allowed to disclose any information about the applications submitted and results of the assessment and selection to anyone. They are also not allowed to use the ideas of the application for their own purposes.

**Good luck and thank you for your interest.
We are looking forward to collaborating with you!
FUTURAL team**