



OPEN CALL

Guidelines for evaluators Open Call 1

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Guidelines for Evaluators for D2XCEL

Open date: 2 April 2024, 14:00 CET

Application deadline: 14 June 2024, 17:00 CET

Evaluation process: Mid-June until mid-August

The information and views set out in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the European Union. Neither the European Union institutions and bodies nor any person acting on their behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained therein.

1. Overview

This *Guidelines for Evaluators* provides the main characteristics of the open call under the D2XCEL project and complements the Guidelines for applicants providing additional information for the evaluation of the applications in the framework of D2XCEL project.

1.1. Who we are

D2XCEL is a collaborative pan-European scaling programme, bringing together a top-tier industry network of 300+ investors, public and private lead customers, and innovation hubs to support deep tech and digital ventures. We holistically mentor the selected ventures and connect them with investors, lead customers and other growth opportunities to strengthen Europe's leadership and sustainable growth in key sectors such as Transport, Logistics, Trade, and Smart Cities.

D2XCEL supports the existing startup ecosystem actors with state-of-the-art methodologies, best practices, tools, and especially pan-European networks. These will be developed and deployed in a program with 100 selected high-potential ventures, assuring both a direct impact on the success of those ventures as well as hands-on experience of the ecosystem actors.

D2XCEL first builds a network of 300 active key stakeholders and identifies market opportunities holding significant demand and growth potential and builds the needed knowledge to scale related companies. It then launches an open call to attract in 2 rounds 100 best companies (10 in each area) and provides them efficient mentoring to help them address their individual challenges and build strategic plans. It then connects them with active investors, corporate partners, lead customers (private and public) and talent.

Raising visibility on the supported companies is also delivered to the portfolio companies as service. D2XCEL brings together a wide consortium of 13 partners from 8 countries, widening countries well represented. The D2XCEL consortium possesses the expertise to understand and analyse the challenges of the supported ventures, can deliver customised mentoring to build their competences and help them address their challenges, attract and motivate investors, partners, customers, talent and innovation ecosystem actors to take part actively in the platform and connect them with the supported companies through a series of events across Europe furthermore creating awareness about the supported ventures to increase their visibility towards potential investors and partners.

1.2. D2XCEL Scaling Programme

D2XCEL's primary goal is to create and implement a sustainable scaling platform, enhancing the existing European startup ecosystem's effectiveness and efficiency. This platform aims to support deep tech and digital ventures in developing market-ready applications, fostering significant growth and impact, particularly in key sectors like Transport, Logistics, Trade, and Smart Cities. By providing state-of-the-art methodologies, best practices, tools, and extensive pan-European networks, D2XCEL helps startup ecosystem actors and support organizations. The program focuses on 100 selected high-potential ventures (startups and scale-ups), ensuring a direct impact on their success and offering ecosystem actors practical experience with new methodologies, networks, and synergies by:

➤ **Tailored support and collaborative services**

The D2XCEL Scaling programme offers tailored support and collaborative mentoring. The programme will provide holistic and time-efficient mentoring to identify and advise on both the specific challenges of each and every venture but also the industry ones.

Companies will receive coaching and support from top experts and industry-specific stakeholders on:

- access to pan-European growth funding, both dilutive and non-dilutive, public and private
- access to pan-European markets and internationalization (incl. legal/tax issues, setting up local subsidiaries, etc.)
- access to lead customers, across borders
- strengthening your founder team and boards and attract the best talent (pan-EU and global)
- building and managing strong IPR portfolios

➤ **Access to network of investors, customers, and partners**

D2XCEL Scaling Programme will foster the development of contacts, opportunities, and networks. The selected companies in the programme will receive support in attracting investments of Series A, series A+ or equivalent and unlock access to potential customers and Europe-wide markets.

The programme's curated roadshow of in-person and online events is a pivotal element in facilitating these opportunities by bringing together the portfolio companies with investors engaged in the programme, corporates, lead customers, corporations, as well as potential talent and leaders. Selected companies can leverage these events to showcase their potential, build strategic relationships, and drive business success.

➤ Raising international awareness and visibility

The D2XCEL Scaling programme is dedicated to promoting the portfolio companies within and outside its networks. By joining our scaling programme, you gain access to prominent expert investors, network partners, leading customers, corporations, and fellow entrepreneurs. Engaging with these stakeholders within the D2XCEL network will enhance the visibility of your venture within relevant industry circles. We offer comprehensive communication services, including the publication of high-quality news articles, success stories, recorded pitches, promotional videos, and insightful podcasts. These materials will be disseminated through the D2XCEL website and across our social media channels.

The D2XCEL network is founded on the shared goal of fostering the growth and success of companies, and we are committed to collaborating to showcase your company not only in Europe but also on a global scale, expanding your market presence.

Value proposition for portfolio companies

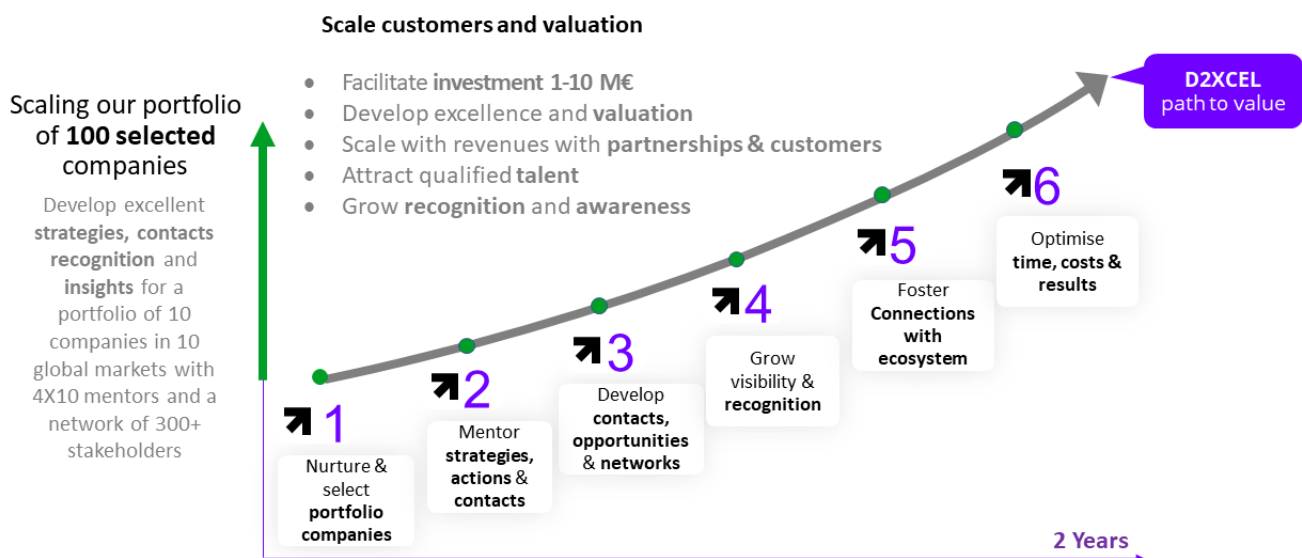


Figure 1 Value proposition for companies

2. D2XCEL Open Call Objectives and Scope

D2XCEL 1st open call focuses on 5 market opportunities. It will attract minimum 125 startup and scaleup applications (25 in each defined market opportunity) and select 50 (10 in each market opportunity) companies that will benefit from the D2XCEL services delivered by the consortium partners, top-class expert mentors in 5 market groups and from network partners delivering additional horizontal services.

The open call aims to discover and select promising ventures for involvement in a tailored scaling program. The primary objective is to provide assistance that fosters the growth and investment opportunities of these startups, ultimately aiming to empower them as prominent leaders in deep tech innovation across Europe.

Please note that D2XCEL does not provide financial support to third parties (FSTP) but delivers highly relevant value through services: mentoring services, connections with business contacts (investors, corporates, customers & procurers, talent) as well as visibility. The total costs of activities and services directly supporting the portfolio of companies (Mentoring, roadshow events, Company visibility) or contribute directly to their support (Engaging active network, gathering insights for the groups) represents 68,69% of the project total budget.

2.1. Open call process

The companies selected through the open call will undergo through a D2XCEL Scaling Programme organised in three phases with specific outputs and outcomes at the end of each phase:

Phase 1 – company application (about 3 months):

The 1st open call be launched on 2 April 2024, 14:00 CET and will address 5 market opportunities. It aims to attract minimum 25 companies in each of the market opportunities. Open Call is published on D2XCEL project website and will be promoted on the project social media channels as well as the ones of the consortium partners to secure more outreach to relevant ventures. All terms for applications and timelines are published in the Open Call text and guidelines. All applicants will use online application form available on the D2XCEL webpage.

Phase 2 – company selection (2 months):

The eligible applications submitted by the Open Call deadline will be subject to assessment by a Selection Panel. The 1st Open Call evaluation will be from mid-June to mid-August to make sure that it runs smooth due to the summer period. Of the minimum 125 applicants will be selected 50 top-ranking companies, or 10 for each of the 5 market opportunities. The Selection Panel will be composed of investors and experts from the D2XCEL stakeholder network for each market opportunity. The 10 highest ranking companies in each market opportunity will be selected and invited to receive scaling support. This way of proceeding ensures a market driven approach, and the selected companies represent a real interest for the market that will potentially create impact.

Phase 3 – D2XCEL Scaling Programme (6-8 months)

The selected 50 companies of the 1st Open Call will be invited to participate in D2XCEL scaling programme in their respective market group free of charge. Each market group will include 10 companies and will be managed by a consortium partner (Group Leader) and supported by 4 experienced mentors with relevant experience at company board level.

2.2 Open Call Timeline

The D2XCEL First Open Call will launch on 2 April 2024 and will accept company applications for approximately 3 months or until 14 June 2024, 17:00 CET. Over the summer months from mid-June to mid-August, a Selection Panel composed of prominent experts will assess the applications and the selection results will be announced to each applicant. The applicants may be contacted if further information is required to reach a final decision. The selected companies will be announced on the project website at the beginning of September. The D2XCEL Services will start after the company commits to the suggested D2XCEL Scaling Programme. The timeline is indicative. It may be adjusted, and small deviations may occur which will be updated on the project website

D2XCEL Open Call 1 timeline

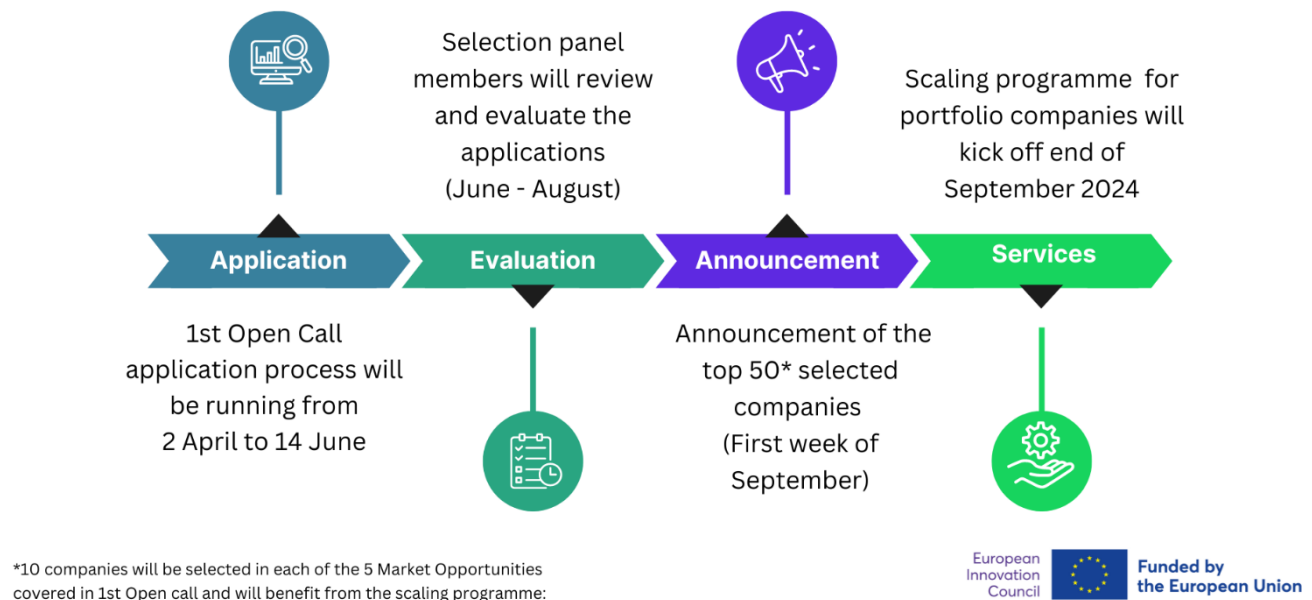


Figure 2 Open Call 1 timeline

2.3. Organisation of Application Evaluation

D2XCEL engages a committed network of minimum 300 key stakeholders as active participants and supporters of the scaling platform for the whole duration of the project. The evaluators are part of this wider stakeholder group and have expressed their interest in participating in D2XCEL platform for different roles, one of them being evaluator. The role of the evaluators is not subject to financial support. As members of the scaling programme, evaluators will benefit from access to all stakeholders, companies' applications, and many opportunities which the programme will entail in the next 2 years. The evaluators may later be assigned to provide paid mentoring services to the selected companies. The recruitment process of stakeholders is not the subject of these Guidelines.

Each evaluator, while expressing their interest in becoming one, has also stated the market opportunity they are competent in. The evaluators are assigned to a relevant market opportunity, depending on their competence and experience in horizontal topics as (not exhaustive) marketing, management, communication, talent management, etc. Each market opportunity has its own Group Manager on behalf of the D2XCEL project consortium. The group managers organise the work in the relevant market opportunity.

No	Market Opportunity (MO) First Open Call	Group Manager
1	Logistics (Freight Tech, Warehouse Tech, Last Mile Delivery)	Miles Ahead
2	Sustainable Freight Transportation	Tech Tour
3	Large-scale Stationary Energy Storage	Bryck
4	Sustainable and Circular Construction	Aalto
5	AI Powered Digital Services for Sustainable and Smart Cities	ACE

Each market opportunity group manager will set up a selection panel composed of investors and experts from the D2XCEL stakeholder pool to ensure market driven selection is done. The Selection Panel is the body that evaluates the received applications and decides on the final company selection. Each group manager will make sure that there is no conflict of interest when allocating applications to the Selection Panel. For example, experts cannot evaluate company which they have nominated. Each market opportunity group manager chairs the selection panel and will organise the selection process for the relevant market opportunity. After the selection process is completed, each group manager will engage the 10 selected companies from their market opportunity for the support and the matchmaking and connection services that will be delivered further by the project.

Each market opportunity selection panel will review and assess a minimum of 25 applications. Each evaluator will be assigned to assess a minimum of 5 companies in a way that at the end of the selection process each company is assessed by at least 3 evaluators. If the number of received applications exceeds 25, an additional company will be assigned for evaluation to each expert in the selection panel, upon agreement.

The application assessment will take approximately up to a month after the Open Call closing date. All the scores for each company will be calculated automatically in simple average scores. Each company will receive a total average score. A list with 10 highest ranking by the total average score companies and runners up will be produced. The final company selection decision will be reached at a Selection Panel online meeting or similar exchange communication.

2.4. Application eligibility criteria

The company application eligibility criteria are embedded in the online application form as mandatory fields.

Any application entry that does not comply with the eligibility criteria will be automatically considered ineligible and rejected. However, the evaluators shall be aware of the eligibility criteria and, if during the evaluation they come across information that contradicts eligibility in the supplied documents provided by the applicant, they shall raise the issue with the Group Manager. In this case, further information from the company shall be requested confirming their eligibility (or not). The Open Call admin will ask the company for this clarification. The issue may be discussed at Selection Panel level and a decision may be taken for that particular case based on the provided additional information.

The eligibility criteria are:

1. Company HQ location (geographical eligibility). Applicants for the D2XCEL open call for proposals should be representatives of an entity legally established in one of the eligible countries listed below.
 - in EU-27 (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Malta, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden
 - or EIC funding eligible countries at the time of project proposal writing: Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Faroe Islands, Georgia, Iceland, Israel, Kosovo¹, Moldova, Montenegro, Morocco, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Tunisia, Türkiye, Ukraine². *Applicants should have less than 25% of (voting) shares held by Russian shareholders concerned by the [EU Restrictive Measures in response to the crisis in the Ukraine](#).*
2. Company maturity (development stage eligibility): deep tech and digital companies that have achieved market-product fit within one of the market opportunities in the scope of the open calls and looking for Series A to Series A+ funding, or to expand their market and have already received at least one of the following types of funding or support:
 - Support from the European Innovation Council (EIC) (Grant or Equity funding or Seal of Excellence)
 - Grant from other EU/National/Regional funding programmes
 - Raised at least a round of financing (seed or later). The latest round of funding should have been raised after 1 January 2019.
3. Company technology (sectorial eligibility) – digital and deeptech solutions in one of the five listed market opportunities and their related technologies. The solutions shall have high exploitation and market potential (TRL5-8), that can contribute to the competitiveness and strategic sovereignty and sustainability of EU industry in key technology areas and value chains, operating in one of the five listed

¹ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

² https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/guidance/list-3rd-country-participation_horizon-auratom_en.pdf, retrieved on 07.03.2024

for each call market opportunities and their related technologies:

- **AI Powered Digital Services for Sustainable and Smart Cities**
- **Large-scale Stationary Energy Storage**
- **Logistics (Freight Tech, Warehouse Tech, Last Mile Delivery)**
- **Sustainable freight Transportation**
- **Sustainable and Circular Construction**

Deep tech, as defined in the EU regulation “is technology that is based on cutting-edge scientific advances and discoveries and is characterised by the need to stay at the technological forefront by constant interaction with new ideas and results from the lab. Deep tech innovation aims to provide concrete solutions to our societal problems by finding its source in a deep interaction with the most recent scientific and technological advances and by seeking to produce a profound impact in the targeted application technologies”³. The Selection Panel will consider and evaluate the applications of all companies that comply with the eligibility criteria. No exceptions can be made related to geographical eligibility criteria.

2.5. Applications submission

There is a unique entry point for all proposals for the Open Call and the link is available on the open call web page [here](#). Any application that was not submitted through the unique entry point will be considered ineligible, regardless of its content. If such a case arises, the applicant shall be advised to apply through the D2XCEL Open Call unique entry point and follow the established procedure.

There is **no direct contact between the applicants and the evaluators** during the whole process of application submission and assessment to ensure fair treatment of all applicants and avoid conflict of interest. If such an occurrence arises, the evaluator shall inform the Group Manager who on their side may advise the applicant to

look at the D2XCEL Open Call FAQ section or raise a question through the provided info@d2xcel.eu.

After the deadline set for the open call expires, the application submission closes.

Additional documentation, including the current Guide for Evaluators, Guide for Applicants, templates for submission, etc. are available on the D2XCEL project web site. You can use this documentation for further reference.

³ https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/wp-call/2023/wp_horizon-eic-2023_en.pdf, retrieved on 07.03.2024

3. Assessment of Applications

3.1. Assessment process

Each eligible application will be assessed by a Selection Panel of evaluators which will assess the application in the relevant market opportunity. Evaluators will receive a list of applications to be reviewed and will receive the applications only after they confirm in writing that there is no conflict of interest with the proposals they have been allocated to review (Absence of Conflict-of-Interest Declaration (ACID), please visit D2XCEL Open Call page for more details). The evaluators will assess each application along 6 criteria, on a scale from 1 to 10 (1 – reflecting the lowest value, 10 – the highest):

Criteria	Rating 1-3	Rating 4-6	Rating 7-9	Rating 10	Evaluator's comment
Eligibility No action is required from the evaluator	Yes or Not, checked automatically by the system upon application.				N/A
Leadership competence/potential	The company team lacks enough skills and experience to grow the business. More manpower is needed and willingness to work with industry and research needs to be improved.	The company team has average skills and experience to grow the business. The management team is involved and there is potential.	The company team has the necessary skills and experience to grow the business and is able/willing to work with industry and research. Credible and consistent sector expertise.	The company team has all the skills and experience to grow the business and is able/willing to work with industry and research. Great potential to take the business to the next level.	
Product/Technology Merit	Technology or product solutions are developed with no or very limited track record/commercial deployment. No clear indication of how the product/technology need is addressed nor	Technology or product solutions are developed, but with unknown/some track record. Address the product/technology need, but not sufficiently differentiated from the competitors.	Technology or product solutions are developed with a demonstrable track record of delivery. Address the product/technology need and has high potential. The product/technology	Technology or product solutions developed are state-of-the-art and well advanced compared to the competitors. Address the product/technology need and is produced in operationally meaningful	

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	<p>how it compares to competitors.</p> <p>The product/technology brings no impact on Sustainability or sovereignty in Europe in the Market Opportunity.</p>	<p>The product/technology brings little impact on Sustainability or sovereignty in Europe in the Market Opportunity.</p>	<p>brings relevant impact on Sustainability or sovereignty in Europe in the Market Opportunity.</p>	<p>quantities.</p> <p>The product/technology brings significant impact on Sustainability or sovereignty in Europe in the Market Opportunity.</p>	
Market Potential	<p>The potential market of customers for the presented product is very niche and the business model is weak.</p>	<p>The potential market of customers for the presented product has potential and/or the business model needs to be improved.</p>	<p>The potential market of customers for the presented product is attractive and the business model has high potential.</p>	<p>The potential market of customers for the presented product is attractive and the business model is strong.</p>	
Go to Market/ Strategy	<p>The company has a poor go-to-market strategy and no clear distinction in position in comparison to its direct and indirect competitors.</p>	<p>The company has a good go-to-market strategy and must work to improve its position in the market compared to its direct and indirect competitors.</p>	<p>The company has a distinct go-to-market strategy and has potential to improve its position in the market in comparison to its direct and indirect competitors.</p>	<p>The company has a clear go to market strategy and is well positioned in the market in comparison with its direct and indirect competitors.</p>	

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Criteria	Rating 1-3	Rating 4-6	Rating 7-9	Rating 10	
Presentation Quality	The presentation and/or Video is not complete, lacks clear articulation and provides little information. Messages need to be more convincing and well executed.	The presentation and/or Video has a good and clear message. Has potential for improvement in execution and delivering a convincing idea.	The Presentation and/or Video is poised, clear, with proper volume and executed with confidence. High potential to be convincing.	The Presentation and/or Video is complete, clear, balanced, with proper volume and convincing.	
Business Clarity/Credibility	The revenue streams on customer acquisition model are poor or have no credibility.	The revenue streams on customer acquisition model are good, but with unknown/some credibility.	The revenue streams on customer acquisition model are well developed and credible.	The revenue streams on customer acquisition model are clear and credible, with proven track record.	

3.2. Thresholds

A simple average is made automatically from the scores given by the evaluators for each company application. Then the company ranking is done based on total average to automatically form a list of top 10 scoring companies in each market opportunity. The applications are considered qualified for final selection if their total average score is 6,00 and above (the required threshold).

The simple average score for any criterion may be lower than 6,00 as far as the total average score is 6,00 and above for a company that goes to selection phase. If the company is selected, these lower scores will be clues to company weaknesses that may need addressing during the D2XCEL Scaling Programme.

3.3. Evaluation Summary Reports – List of Selected Companies

The assessment will be done by the evaluators remotely with a Final Selection meeting for each market opportunity selection panel chaired by a group manager (a D2XCEL consortium partner who leads the relevant market opportunity).

The procedure for prioritising applications which have been awarded the same score (ex aequos) within the rank list is described below:

- Proposals will be prioritised according to the scores they have been awarded for the criterion Product/Technology Merit.
- When these scores are equal, priority will be based on the scores for the criteria Product/Technology Merit and Business Clarity/Credibility.
- When these scores are equal, any further prioritisation will be based on the criteria Product/Technology Merit and Business Clarity/Credibility and Leadership competence/potential.

The top 10 companies of the rank list for each market opportunity will be the list of proposals to invite for joining the D2XCEL services. A reserve list will also be compiled with the next highest ranked proposals to select from it in case a company from the top 10 is unable to complete the process and sign a commitment document to engage with the D2XCEL Scaling Programme for any reason.

The expected number of proposals to be selected after the open call is 50 (10 for each market opportunity). This is only an indicative number and D2XCEL can deviate from these numbers for multiple reasons. A company from the First Open Call may be forwarded to the second one if its technology fits better in the next 5 market opportunities that are to be addressed by it.

In case the highest ranked proposals are deemed of inadequate quality (cover threshold of 5.99 and lower) we may not make any selection. This is obligatory in case all proposals fall below our total average threshold scores.

3.4. Language

English is the official language for D2XCEL Open Call. Submissions done in any other language will not be evaluated. The evaluators will have an opportunity to add comments to their assessment. A special field for that is available in the evaluation file against each evaluation criteria. The comments in this field shall be in English language only.

3.5. Number of applications per applicant

As a general rule, only one application per company can be selected for the D2XCEL programme. The same company may submit more than one proposal but can be selected for receiving D2XCEL services only once. In case a company was selected after the D2XCEL First Open Call, it cannot be selected for the Second Open Call.

4. Other considerations

4.1. Questions

Any questions related to assessment of application can be addressed to the group manager of the relevant market opportunity selection panel.

4.2. Useful documents

All useful documents and templates, including the Guide for Applicants, are publicly available on the D2XCEL webpage.

All the Open Call Documents can be viewed or downloaded on the website [here](#). The set contains:

- Guidelines for Applicants
- Guidelines for Evaluators
- Declaration of Absence of Conflict of Interest for evaluators
- Open call Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

4.3. Privacy

Personal data shall be collected, processed and published in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2016/679, also known as GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation). Please refer to the Privacy Statement in the online application form for full details.

4.4. Conflict of interest

Evaluators and applicants are required to avoid any actual or potential conflicts of interest throughout the selection process and their entire involvement with D2XCEL project. Conflicts of interest encompass any

situations that might unduly influence the impartiality of those involved in the selection process or project implementation, including financial interests, personal relationships, or any factors that could compromise impartiality. The relevant selection panel and consortium partners will evaluate each case of conflict of interest individually, if any. If a participant in D2XCEL project activities, be it evaluator or an applicant, is found to have a conflict of interest, it may lead to them being excluded or prevented from participating further in the project.

D2XCEL consortium partners, their affiliated entities, employees, and permanent collaborators are prohibited from submitting proposals and receiving support through D2XCEL open calls, as this would violate the regulations of the European Commission.

All participants will be also asked to sign an Absence of Conflict-of-Interest Declaration to avoid conflict of interest.