

Call for Proposals

AiNed ELSA Labs 2026

Date: September 2026

AI lifecycle Compliance: RegGuides, RegTech and Supervisory Guidance



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1 Introduction

This document constitutes the third Call for Proposals of the AiNed Programme ELSA Labs. The AiNed programme has been awarded funding by the Dutch government under the National Growth Fund (NGF). The first round of ELSA Labs, launched in 2021, addressed the theme *'Artificial Intelligence: Human-Centred AI for an Inclusive Society, Towards an Ecosystem of Trust'*. The second round, launched in 2024, was entitled *'Human-Centred Artificial Intelligence'*. The third round focuses on the theme *'AI Lifecycle Compliance: RegGuides, RegTech and Supervisory Guidance'*.

This Call for Proposals sets out the application procedure for this funding round. You will find information on the AiNed programme, AIC4NL and the AICC (Chapter 1), the substantive framework of this Call for Proposals (Chapter 2), the structure of an ELSA Lab (Chapter 3), the submission requirements (Chapter 4), and the timeline (Chapter 5). You will also find the criteria against which your AiNed ELSA Lab proposal will be assessed (Chapter 6), the monitoring arrangements applicable to funded proposals (Chapter 7), and the requirements your proposal must meet (Chapter 8).

Further information required for the submission of a proposal, including the current templates, the sector-specific roadmaps and agendas, and the concurrently published document 'AiNed Rules of Engagement', is available on the website of Stichting AI Coalitie voor Nederland (<https://aic4nl.nl>).

1.1 National Growth Fund Programme AiNed

The National Growth Fund (NGF) programme AiNed, administered by Stichting AI Coalitie voor Nederland (AIC4NL), aims to position the Netherlands as a leading European entity in AI innovation, research and application, with particular attention to sectors of substantial economic and societal importance to the Netherlands.

The AiNed programme comprises four interrelated thematic sub-programmes, each addressing specific but connected challenges.

- *Research, innovation and transition* supports, through AiNed InnovationLabs, collaborative partnerships between businesses, knowledge institutions and civil society organisations in developing AI applications. This sub-programme also includes the AiNed ELSA Labs, in which AI methodologies and instruments are developed and evaluated against ethical and legal standards, with an emphasis on public values and norms.
- *Talent, knowledge and skills* supports the development and recruitment of AI expertise through AiNed Learning Communities and AiNed Fellowship Grants.
- *Startups and scale-ups* guides startups, through the Breaking Barriers programme, in scaling up AI activities into scale-ups so as to achieve impact at national and international level.
- *Connected ecosystem* focuses on strengthening the Dutch ecosystem as a foundation for the development of AI applications and for new AI methods and techniques. This sub-programme has, among other things, given rise to the initiative for the Dutch AI Factory.

The long-term impact that AiNed pursues is stronger economic growth driven by AI, a greater strategic autonomy for Dutch industry, and recognition as one of the world's leading AI nations. In this manner, the AiNed programme aims to make a substantial contribution to AI innovations that offer demonstrable added value for the Dutch economy and society.

1.2 Background to AIC4NL

Stichting AIC4NL is the public-private platform dedicated to accelerating the responsible development and application of AI in the Netherlands. AIC4NL connects knowledge institutions, industry and government bodies and link them to targeted instruments that promote AI adoption within sectors of strategic importance to the Netherlands.

AIC4NL's mission is to drive and implement a responsible AI transition in the Netherlands, thereby preserving and strengthening the country's competitiveness and innovative capacity. Central to this mission is FairTech AI, an approach to AI development aimed at building algorithmic systems that are ethical, non-discriminatory, transparent and compliant with European privacy and human rights law. Through a nationwide network of AI hubs, regional, national and international actors are engaged, working together to establish a strong AI position for the Netherlands within Europe. As an opinion leader, coordinator and programme architect, AIC4NL is committed to a Netherlands in which AI not only accelerates innovation but also supports societal transitions. By connecting AI programmes such as AiNed to the community of knowledge institutions, SMEs, startups, scale-ups, businesses, government

bodies and civil society organisations, relevant parties are brought together, facilitating the development of groundbreaking AI solutions that contribute to sustainable economic growth and societal impact.

1.3 Background to Artificial Intelligence Coordination Center (AICC)

For this round of the AiNed ELSA Labs, Stichting AIC4NL collaborates with the Netherlands' Radiocommunications Agency for Digital Infrastructure (Rijksinspectie Digitale Infrastructuur, RDI) and the Dutch Data Protection Authority (Autoriteit Persoonsgegevens, AP). Both organisations jointly coordinate supervision of the AI Regulation in the Netherlands within the AI Coordination Center (AICC). In this capacity, the AICC supports coordination among the relevant (market) supervisory authorities under the AI Regulation.

The AI Regulation confers upon supervisory authorities a dual mandate, comprising, on the one hand, supervision of compliance with applicable laws and regulations, and, on the other, the promotion of innovation. The collaboration between AIC4NL and the AICC is directed at the practical implementation of this innovation mandate, through the involvement in the development of RegGuides and RegTech. This enables supervisory authorities to provide more targeted support to AI developers and providers in applying the EU AI Act to innovative AI systems, and in addressing the practical difficulties encountered in this regard. The collaboration does not affect the processes or the substantive handling of the Regulatory Sandboxes conducted by the supervisory authorities.

In their capacity within the AICC, and independently of their formal supervisory responsibilities, the RDI and the AP endorse the objective of this Call for Proposals, namely to render it easier and more transparent for organisations, and in particular for small and medium-sized enterprises, to obtain insight into the laws and regulations applicable under the AI Regulation, and to improve accessibility to tooling that facilitates compliance.

1.4 Substantive framework of the Call for Proposals

AiNed ELSA Labs are public-private partnerships that address the ethical, legal and societal aspects of artificial intelligence. AiNed ELSA Labs are dedicated to developing practically applicable guidance, methodologies and instruments that support organisations in the fair and responsible use, adoption and development of AI (FairTech AI).

The theme of this call for proposals is '*AI Lifecycle Compliance: RegGuides, RegTech and Supervisory Guidance*'. The aim of the call is to develop and validate practically applicable guidance documents (RegGuides) and technical assessment instruments (RegTech) that reduce the technical, legal and organisational burden of AI compliance for industry. The central research question is how such guidance and assessment instruments can be designed and validated so that organisations, in particular SMEs, are enabled to develop, implement and apply AI technology in accordance with the requirements of the EU AI Act. Each ELSA Lab is required to combine research into this question with the practical development and validation of the guidance documents and assessment instruments concerned. The issuing of conformity declarations for AI systems, tools or applications under the EU AI Act or other (AI) regulations falls outside the scope of the AiNed ELSA Labs.

AiNed ELSA Lab proposals should distinguish themselves by focusing the guidance and assessment instruments to be researched, developed and validated on:

- one phase of the AI lifecycle (more than one is permitted): design, pre-deployment or post-deployment;
- one role and set of responsibilities relating to human action in connection with the AI system (more than one is permitted), for instance the user as assessor, as monitor, or as remote party responsible.

AiNed ELSA Lab proposals must focus on the application of AI technology and tools within the AiNed priority application sectors: technical industry; energy and sustainability; mobility, transport and logistics; and health and care. A combination of sectors within a single ELSA Lab is permitted.

The newly funded ELSA Labs will operate within the broader national AI ecosystem, which, alongside the ELSA Labs, also comprises AiNed Learning Communities, AiNed InnovationLabs and a System Breakthrough Project. AIC4NL aims for a balanced portfolio and optimal coherence between these initiatives. An overview of initiatives already funded is available on the website of Stichting AIC4NL (<https://aic4nl.nl>).

1.5 Available Budget

The maximum budget available for funding AiNed ELSA Labs under this Call for Proposals is €6,900,000. Within this Call for Proposals, three proposals are expected to be selected for funding, each receiving a maximum of €2,300,000. Following the AIC4NL Board's decision on which proposals will be awarded funding, the selected consortia will submit these proposals to The Netherlands Enterprise Agency (Rijksdienst voor Ondernemend

Nederland, RVO), in coordination with AIC4NL, requesting funding. Funding is only confirmed once RVO has issued this decision. AIC4NL selects applications on the basis of the process and criteria described in Chapter 5.

1.6 Submission Deadline

The deadline for submitting the **pre-proposal** is **30-10-2026**, 18:00 CET.

The deadline for submitting the **full proposal** is **11-12-2026**, 18:00 CET.

Proposals submitted after the deadline will not be considered. Submission of a pre-proposal is a mandatory precondition for submitting a full proposal. Participation in the co-creation session and the pitch is likewise mandatory (see Chapter 8).

2 Substantive Framework

2.1 Background and Problem Statement

The EU AI Act formally entered into force in August 2024 and imposes compliance obligations on organisations that develop, implement or otherwise use AI applications. These obligations are context-dependent and call for an integrated approach that combines technical, legal and organisational aspects. Existing guidelines and frameworks are often generic in nature, formulated in abstract terms, or not directly applicable to the specific context of businesses that develop and apply AI. At the same time, the uptake of AI within industry is increasing rapidly. The economic pressure to adopt AI is considerable, while the risks of non-compliance, reputational damage and liability are a growing concern.

Businesses, and SMEs in particular, therefore have an urgent need for well-founded, applicable and validated approaches and tools that offer practical guidance and greater operational certainty when translating the requirements of the AI Regulation into their own processes, systems and responsibilities.

This Call for Proposals for AiNed ELSA Labs focuses on research into, and the development of, concrete guidance documents and methodologies (RegGuides) and technical assessment tools (RegTech) that support businesses in strengthening their confidence that they comply with the AI Regulation when developing and applying AI technology, tools and applications.

2.2 Objective and Research Question

The central research question addressed by this Call for Proposals states:

How can practical guidance documents (regulatory guides, RegGuides) and technical assessment tools (regulatory technology, RegTech), tailored to a specific phase of the AI lifecycle and to a specific role and responsibility of human action in relation to an AI system, be designed and validated in such a way that organisations, in particular SMEs, are enabled to develop, implement and adopt AI technology, tools and applications in accordance with the requirements of the EU AI Act?

The AiNed programme aims for the three ELSA Labs to be funded to be complementary, as far as possible, across both thematic structuring elements, namely (i) *the specific phase of the AI lifecycle* and (ii) *the specific role and responsibility of human action in relation to the AI system* that each ELSA Lab addresses (see Section 2.3).

The outcomes of the research into, and the development and validation of, guidance documents and technical assessment tools will be delivered by the ELSA Labs in the form of initial usable products or software versions, referred to hereafter as 'prototypes', of the following:

- *Regulatory guides (RegGuides)*: practical, documented guidance and methodologies that support organisations in meeting the requirements of the EU AI Act.
- *Regulatory technology (RegTech)*: technical, software-based assessment tools that enable organisations to systematically evaluate AI systems and processes against the requirements of the EU AI Act.

Research, development and validation of RegGuides and RegTech takes place through two interdependent, iterative approaches. First, the prototypes are developed and validated in a targeted way within industry driven use cases. These use cases are derived from cases contributed by AI technology providers and users from the business community. In each use case, AICC contributes substantive expertise to strengthen the development and validation process, drawing on the supervisory authority's innovation mandate. This collaboration enables real-world testing

within a controlled environment, in which legal interpretation and reflection form an integral part of the iterative research, development and validation process.

Second, the prototypes are developed and validated iteratively by the ELSA Lab's core partners in such a way that broader applicability is ensured. This makes it possible for the research into, development of, and validation of the prototypes to also be relevant to providers and users of AI technology in comparable contexts who have not contributed a use case within the ELSA Lab. Knowledge sharing and the accessibility of the resulting outcomes are therefore explicit objectives for every ELSA Lab.

2.3 Thematic Framework

Objective

Every ELSA Lab proposal is required to address the substantive framework of the theme of this Call for Proposals, *'AI Lifecycle Compliance: RegGuides, RegTech and Supervisory Guidance'*. Each proposal must explicitly describe its approach to the central research question set out in Section 2.2, together with a description of how the outcomes to be delivered (the prototypes) contribute to this substantive framework. The thematic objective of this call falls within the broader objectives of AIC4NL's thematic working area 'Values, Norms and Regulation'.

Structural thematic element I: AI lifecycle

Every ELSA Lab proposal should preferably focus on one phase of the AI lifecycle. This phase determines the point at which compliance and responsibility are organised in relation to an AI technology or application, and it therefore forms the substantive basis for the RegGuides and RegTech to be developed. Provided this is clearly justified, an ELSA Lab proposal may also address more than one phase of the AI lifecycle.

The three phases of the AI lifecycle distinguished for the purposes of this Call for Proposals are as follows.

- *Design ('compliance by design')*: responsibility, risk management and requirements are built in during the design process.
- *Pre-deployment ('test before launch')*: a system has been developed but has not yet been put into production. Technical and legal assessment takes place before the system is brought into use.
- *Post-deployment ('monitor and adapt')*: a system is in use and is monitored for compliance with requirements, for example following functional updates, through the timely identification of risks and through the organisation of intervention where necessary.

Structural thematic element II: Human role in action and responsibility

The EU AI Act sets requirements for human oversight and human responsibility but leaves open how these are implemented in practice. The manner in which a human is involved with an AI system determines the technical, legal and organisational compliance questions that a use case must address. A use case should, preferably, be positioned at one of the following three levels of human role in action and responsibility.

- *The user as assessor ('human-in-the-loop')*. The human is actively involved in every decision. The AI system generates an output after which the human assesses it and makes the decision.
- *The user as monitor ('human-on-the-loop')*. The AI system carries out tasks largely independently, but the human maintains oversight and can intervene. Formal ultimate responsibility rests with the human, although actual involvement is limited.
- *The user as remote party responsible ('human-in-command')*. The system acts independently within its environment, without direct human involvement in individual decisions or actions. The human nonetheless bears ultimate responsibility.

Every ELSA Lab proposal must formulate the relevant research question(s) and specify the role that the RegGuides and RegTech play in the practice of AI developers and users. In addition, provided this is clearly justified, a proposal may also address more than one of the human roles in action and responsibility set out above.

Sectoral Embedment

AiNed ELSA Lab proposals must focus on the application of AI technology and tools within the AiNed priority application sectors: technical industry; energy and sustainability; mobility, transport and logistics; and health and care. A combination of sectors within a single ELSA Lab is permitted. The sector or sectors chosen form the *real-world context* within which the RegGuides and RegTech prototypes are researched, developed, tested and validated.

3 Structure of an AiNed ELSA Lab

An AiNed ELSA Lab is a public-private partnership between businesses, knowledge institutions and civil society organisations. Core partners participate for the full duration of the ELSA Lab. Co-partners participate for a shorter period, in connection with a specific use case. The structure of an ELSA Lab combines a multi-year thematic agenda with the flexibility to respond to current developments in regulation, technology and market needs.

3.1 Multi-year Thematic Agenda

The multi-year agenda forms the substantive and strategic foundation of the ELSA Lab. It is drawn up by the ELSA Lab's core partners, who set out in it the thematic focus, the choices made within the structuring elements, the sectoral focus, the intended RegGuide and RegTech prototypes, the target groups, and the manner in which results will be made available to the wider community.

The multi-year agenda demonstrates how the chosen lifecycle phases, human positions and application domains relate to the ELSA Lab's central research question and to one another as a coherent whole. It shows how the co-partners' use cases jointly contribute to the development of generalisable RegGuides and RegTech that can be widely applied across business, and in particular by SMEs.

The agenda includes an explicit dissemination strategy describing how the knowledge and prototypes developed are made accessible to parties outside the consortium itself, and how interim results are shared with the wider SME community and relevant supervisory authorities. To this end, every ELSA Lab must, in particular, take an active part in meetings of AIC4NL's thematic working area 'Values, Norms and Regulation'.

The agenda also sets out the strategy for the partnership's independent operation once AiNed funding has ended, referred to as the *sustainable exit*. Every ELSA Lab is expected to work, from the outset, towards a form of financial and organisational independence, so that it can continue to function as a dynamic collaborative environment for the research, development, validation and use of FairTech AI.

3.2 Use Cases

Focus

Within the multi-year thematic agenda, the core partners of an AiNed ELSA Lab must carry out at least four short-cycle use cases together with co-partners. Each use case runs for a period of six to nine months. A use case constitutes the concrete, real-world context in which RegGuides and RegTech are researched, developed, tested and validated.

The research focus of a use case arises from a collaboration between industry partners centred on an AI adoption process. This focus addresses the shared challenges that businesses face in giving concrete shape to, and validating, their compliance process when applying AI -technology, a -tool or a solution within a specific process, service or product. This results in two related outcomes.

- A concrete AI application, developed and implemented by the partners involved, in which the RegGuide and RegTech prototypes are deployed and validated as practical support in translating the requirements of the AI Regulation into the use case's own processes, systems and responsibilities.
- Feedback on the RegGuide and RegTech prototypes researched and developed, based on their application, validation and the practical experience gained within the use case.

Every use case concludes with a dissemination activity aimed at transferring the results to the wider SME community, supervisory authorities and other relevant parties.

Participating co-partners

At least two businesses take part in each use case, fulfilling the following roles.

- i. An SME or startup AI developer, or a provider of an AI technology or tool that is deployed within the adoption process.
- ii. A business that procures an AI technology, -tool or -solution and wishes to apply it within a specific process, service or product.

The SME AI developer or provider supplies technical insights for the development of the RegTech prototype and documents its functioning and limitations. The AI user contributes the practical context of the use case, facilitates test environments, and validates the usability of the RegGuide and the RegTech prototype from the end user's perspective. Other organisations may be involved within a use case, provided they make an essential contribution to that use case.

A sectoral supervisory authority takes part in every use case. AICC arranges the link with the appropriate authority on the basis of relevant sector knowledge and supervisory expertise. Applicants are therefore not required to include a specific supervisory authority in the consortium or use case at the time of submission.

The supervisory authority participates on the basis of its innovation mandate and fulfils the following roles, drawing on its sector knowledge and practical experience:

- Interpretation and clarification: engaging in dialogue within the use case regarding which rules apply and where further clarification is desired, and sharing relevant enforcement and sector knowledge with the project partners.
- Reflection: providing insight into the extent to which the RegGuide and the RegTech prototype align with practice.
- Signalling function: identifying broader issues relevant to policy and sectoral supervision.
- Regulatory sandbox: facilitating referral to the national regulatory sandbox and setting out the conditions applicable to it.
- Creating opportunities and possibilities: exploring the scope offered by the current or future regulatory framework to accelerate innovation.
- Dissemination: sharing relevant results from the use cases and the ELSA Lab within its own chain and with European networks.

Level of detail required at submission

The research focus and intended outcomes of all the use cases do not need to be fully fixed at the time the ELSA Lab proposal is submitted. This leaves sufficient scope for tailoring and further development over the course of the ELSA Lab.

An exception applies to the first use case, which must be fully elaborated at the time the ELSA Lab proposal is submitted. Where the submitting consortium considers this desirable, more than one use case may already be elaborated and submitted at the level of detail set out below. This elaboration must include at least the following elements:

- The co-partners participating in the use case.
- A description of the AI adoption process of the participating organisations within the chosen sector.
- The chosen position within the structuring elements, namely (i) *the AI lifecycle phase* and (ii) *the human role in action and responsibility*.
- The manner in which the use case contributes to the development and validation of the RegGuide and RegTech prototypes.
- The budget allocation and timetable of the co-partners.

Subsequent use cases are submitted over the course of the AiNed ELSA Lab in accordance with the procedures that apply at that time. For selected and funded ELSA Lab proposals, funding for the entire duration will be reserved at the outset, up to the maximum stated in Section 1.5, and will be awarded to the core partners and to co-partners in use cases that have been fully elaborated.

3.3 Composition of the Consortium

The composition of an AiNed ELSA Lab consists of core partners and co-partners.

- **Core partners.** Core partners form the backbone of the lab for its entire duration. They are responsible for the research, development and validation of the RegGuide and RegTech prototypes. Core partners link the use cases to one another, ensure knowledge sharing between partners, and translate practical lessons into generic methods and instruments that can be widely applied. Core partners receive AiNed funding and provide their own contribution (an in-kind contribution). Core partners must include at least the following.
 - a. One knowledge institution actively involved in the research, development and validation of the RegGuides and RegTech, and responsible for the RegGuide prototype.
 - b. One industry partner that is active, or wishes to become active, in the RegTech market and is responsible for the RegTech prototype.

Core partners fill the following organisational and leadership roles.

- a. Lead applicant, who acts as the point of contact for Stichting AIC4NL and the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO) on behalf of all partners in the consortium. The lead applicant is responsible for financial and progress reporting, and for any changes to the project plan or budget, on behalf of all partners. The lead applicant may be either a knowledge institution or a business.

- b. Lab lead, responsible for the strategic development of the ELSA Lab, for engaging new use case co-partners, for coordination with AIC4NL's thematic working area 'Values, Norms and Regulation', and for liaison with AICC and the linked sectoral supervisory authority.
- c. Tech lead, responsible for the substantive and technical quality of the use cases' deliverables, for quality assurance of the RegGuide and RegTech prototypes, and for coordination with other AiNed initiatives in the area of methodologies and technical assessment tools.
- **Co-partner.** A use case co-partner is a business, civil society organisation or knowledge institution that carries out activities within a use case. A co-partner is linked to the AiNed ELSA Lab for the duration of the use case. A co-partner may participate in more than one use case, but each use case must be a self-contained activity that can be concluded independently. A co-partner receives AiNed funding and provides its own contribution (an in-kind contribution).

In addition to core partners and co-partners, the following parties may also take part in the ELSA Lab.

- **Co-financier.** A co-financier is an organisation that takes part in the consortium and provides a cash and/or in-kind contribution to the AiNed ELSA Lab. A co-financier does not receive AiNed funding and cannot act as lead applicant or co-applicant. The conditions relating to co-financing are set out in the 'AiNed Rules of Engagement' document.
- **Collaboration partner.** A collaboration partner is a party that neither receives AiNed funding nor provides co-financing to the AiNed ELSA Lab. A collaboration partner is closely involved with the AiNed ELSA Lab by providing expertise, resources or services. A collaboration partner cannot act as lead applicant or co-applicant. Examples of collaboration partners include trade associations, organisations without a Chamber of Commerce registration, multinationals, and AI hubs.

3.4 Embedding in the AI Ecosystem

Stichting AIC4NL is committed to strengthening coherence between activities within the AiNed programme and its areas of work. Connection constitutes the guiding principle in this regard. Through collaboration, AiNed ELSA Labs increase the impact of their activities and contribute to a balanced and well-coordinated approach to AI. Contributing to joint programme activities within sectoral and thematic working areas is essential in this respect. Stichting AIC4NL organises meetings for this purpose, in which the lead applicant, Lab lead and Tech lead (or their mandated representatives) take part.

Thematic working area

The AiNed programme component ELSA Lab falls within AIC4NL's thematic working area 'Values, Norms and Regulation'. This working area organises substantive presentations, seminars, strategic discussions and project development focused on the methodological and technological development of values, norms and regulation within the broader AI domain. The sharing of substantive lessons and experience likewise increases the relevance and impact of the ELSA Labs. Joint formats, tools, working methods and forms of collaboration are developed as part of this process. Proposals must demonstrate how the proposed ELSA Lab will actively participate in this area of work, which includes committing to regular coordination with the thematic working area 'Values, Norms and Regulation'.

Sectoral working area

An AiNed ELSA Lab carries out use cases within one or more of the four priority application domains: technical industry; energy and sustainability; mobility, transport and logistics; and health and care. For each of these four application domains, AIC4NL maintains a coordination and collaboration structure in the form of a sectoral working area. AiNed ELSA Labs contribute to sectoral applications of AI by presenting the results of their use cases within the relevant sectoral area of work. The Lab lead and the lead of the sectoral working area relevant to an ELSA Lab consult regularly on the supply of, and demand for, potential use cases arising from businesses active in the sector. This process also serves to coordinate with other AiNed initiatives, such as Learning Communities and InnovationLabs, that are active within the same sectoral application domain.

AI-hubs

The AI Hubs perform a connecting role at regional level, supporting the engagement of businesses and other relevant parties within the region in which the AI Hub is active. Proposals are therefore advised to seek coordination with the relevant AI hub or hubs, as a collaboration partner, as early as possible. AI hubs may not act as (co-) applicant for an AiNed ELSA Lab, and staff of an AI hub may not be funded as participants from AiNed resources. An overview of the AI hubs and their contact persons is available on the website of Stichting AIC4NL (<https://aic4nl.nl>).

3.5 Impact and Key Performance Indicators

An AiNed ELSA Lab is required to make a demonstrable contribution to the societal and economic impact of FairTech AI adoption in the Netherlands, and to strengthen the position of the Netherlands as a leading European country in the field of responsible AI in accordance with the EU AI Act. The AiNed programme monitors these contributions by means of various output, outcome and impact indicators. ELSA Labs funded under this Call for Proposals must demonstrably contribute to, and report annually on, the following output performance indicators.

- At least one SME, including startups and scale-ups, must take part in each use case.
- The total financial own contribution from businesses and civil society organisations must be at least €2,250,000.
- The ELSA Lab must demonstrate the use of at least one validated RegGuide prototype and disseminate its results to business and relevant supervisory authorities.
- The ELSA Lab must demonstrate at least one validated RegTech prototype and disseminate its results to business and relevant supervisory authorities.

In addition, every ELSA Lab is required to include in its annual report a section addressing its contribution to the following outcome and impact indicators:

- Increased AI adoption within business, achieved by developing, implementing and applying AI technology in accordance with the requirements of the EU AI Act.
- Encouragement of the development and use of AI techniques, tools and applications within business in accordance with the FairTech AI principles.
- New collaborations formed between Dutch businesses, knowledge institutions, civil society organisations and government.
- Strengthening of European strategic autonomy through the impact of RegGuides and RegTech.

4 Funding Framework

An AiNed ELSA Lab proposal may request a maximum of €2,300,000 in funding over a period of three years. Because this call places particular emphasis on strengthening future economic earning capacity, at least €1,500,000 of this AiNed funding must be allocated to businesses and civil society organisations. This means that knowledge institutions may request a maximum of €800,000 in AiNed funding.

The maximum permissible funding rate depends, on the one hand, on the applicable state aid basis and, on the other, does not exceed 40% of the eligible costs. The table below summarises the maximum funding rates for the different types of organisation.

Type of organisation	Maximum permissible funding rate
Knowledge institutions	100% of eligible costs for non-economic activities.
Businesses and civil society organisations	40% of total eligible costs for funding.

Further explanation regarding the state aid basis is set out on the website of the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO) and in the budget form, which will be made available after the co-creation workshop.

5 Timeline

	Process stage	Date
1	Publication of Call for Proposals	24-09-2026
2	Webinar I	13-10-2026
3	Submission pre-proposal	30-10-2026
4	Co-creation workshop	Week 45
5	Pitch	Week 47
7	Submission of full proposal	11-12-2026
8	Possible administrative correction following eligibility check	Week 51
9	Assessment procedure by the Committee	Jan 2027 – maart 2027
10	Opportunity for rebuttal	Week 9 2027
11	Interview round by the Committee	Week 10 2027
12	Formulation of advice to the AIC4NL Board	Week 11 2027

13	Final decision by the AIC4NL Board and feedback to applicants	Week 12 2027
14	Submission of proposal to RVO for funding	within two months of the final decision

Explanation of the submission procedure

1. **Publication of the Call for Proposals.** On 24-09-2026 the Call for Proposals was published on the website of Stichting AIC4NL (<https://aic4nl.nl>).
2. **Webinar I.** On 13-10-2026 (subject to confirmation) an information session will be held in the form of a webinar, which is open to all interested applicants free of charge. The purpose of this session is to answer questions about the published Call for Proposals ahead of submission of the pre-proposal. Questions may be submitted in advance of the webinar so that answers can be prepared. Registration is possible via the web form of Stichting AIC4NL (<https://aic4nl.nl>); you will receive a confirmation after registering. Questions may be submitted ahead of the webinar to elsalabs@aic4nl.nl.
3. **Submission of the pre-proposal (mandatory).** Interested parties register their initiative by submitting a pre-proposal no later than 30-10-2026. No pre-proposal can be submitted after this time. Submitting a pre-proposal is mandatory in order to be able to submit a full proposal at a later stage. The pre-proposal can be submitted via the web form of Stichting AIC4NL (<https://aic4nl.nl>). The lead applicant will receive an automatic acknowledgement of receipt after submission.
4. **Co-creation workshop (mandatory).** During the initiative phase, Stichting AIC4NL organises one or more co-creation workshops to help refine proposals and, where relevant, combine them ahead of the intended proposal to be submitted. Attendance at the co-creation workshop is mandatory for the lead applicant. The workshop is also open to parties who do not intend to submit an initiative of their own but wish to explore joining an existing consortium.
5. **Pitch (mandatory).** During the mandatory pitch session, intended proposals are presented by their prospective applicants, and Stichting AIC4NL provides non-binding feedback to support development of the full proposal. At least one member of the ELSA Lab management team (lead applicant, Lab lead or Tech lead) must attend the pitch session for each intended proposal.
6. **Submission of the full proposal.** A standard form is available for submitting the full proposal, on the webpage for this Call for Proposals. Your full proposal must follow the questions set out in this form, and must comply with the applicable word limits. Your fully completed application form must be received by AIC4NL before the deadline of 11-12-2026. No full proposal can be submitted after this time. The lead applicant will receive an acknowledgement of receipt once the full proposal has been submitted.
7. **Possible correction following the eligibility check.** As soon as possible after you submit your full proposal, you will be informed whether Stichting AIC4NL will process your application. Stichting AIC4NL determines this on the basis of a number of administrative and technical criteria (the eligibility check). Stichting AIC4NL can only process your full proposal if it meets these criteria. Please note that Stichting AIC4NL may contact you within one week of the submission deadline to request administrative corrections needed to meet the submission requirements. You will be given one opportunity to make such corrections, within a period of five working days.
8. **Assessment procedure.** Your proposal is submitted to experts for comment. The experts provide written, substantiated comments on your proposal, structured around the substantive assessment criteria (see Chapter 6). The assessment committee forms its own judgement on the basis of the material available. The experts' advice is, to a significant extent, decisive in shaping the committee's judgement, but is not necessarily adopted in full. The independent assessment committee weighs the experts' arguments, including against one another, and draws up a preliminary recommendation following its discussion.
9. **Rebuttal.** The lead applicant receives a number of questions or comments in writing from the independent assessment committee. The lead applicant then has the opportunity to formulate a response and submit it within five working days. Should the lead applicant decide to withdraw the proposal, this must be reported to Stichting AIC4NL by email as soon as possible. If Stichting AIC4NL receives your response after the deadline, it will not be taken into account in the further procedure.
10. **Interview round.** The interview forms part of the assessment procedure. The independent assessment committee decides, on the basis of its preliminary recommendation and the applicant's response, which proposals are invited for interview. During the interview, a delegation of no more than four people, including the consortium's lead applicant, presents the proposal to the assessment committee. The committee then has the opportunity to ask questions, which the consortium can respond to during the interview. This process ensures a further exchange of views. The interview is an important part of the assessment and may lead to adjustment of the assessment and the preliminary judgement.
11. **Assessment committee advice.** Following its discussion, the committee draws up a final written recommendation for the Board of Stichting AIC4NL, in accordance with the procedure set out in the simultaneously published AiNed Rules of Engagement document and the substantive assessment criteria.

12. **Final decision-making.** Finally, the Board of Stichting AIC4NL reviews the procedure followed and the assessment committee's recommendation. The Board establishes the final assessment and decides whether to approve or reject the applications. The consortium is then informed of the AIC4NL Board's decision.
13. **Submission to RVO.** The funding decision for selected proposals is issued by RVO. Before selected proposals can be submitted for funding, AIC4NL may request a number of final adjustments. Once these have been processed, the final proposal must be submitted to RVO within two months of the Board's decision. RVO may ask additional questions about the submitted proposal in order to carry out its assessment against the applicable legal and financial frameworks.

6 Assessment

6.1 Assessment Scores

Applications submitted under this Call for Proposals are assessed on their merits against the criteria set out below, each carrying a separate weighting. These assessment criteria are further operationalised below through a number of sub-aspects. The final score is the weighted average of the four sub-scores and is rounded to one decimal place for the purposes of ranking. For the description of the score, it is rounded to a whole number of points.

	Criterion	Weighting of total score
1	Motivation, strategic relevance and alignment with objectives	30%
2	Composition and organisation	25%
3	Impact and feasibility	25%
4	Embedding and knowledge transfer	20%

To be eligible for funding, an application must achieve at least the qualification 'satisfactory' on each of the four criteria individually. The scoring scale for the criteria is as follows:

Punten	Omschrijving
10	Outstanding
9	Excellent
8	Good
7	Amplely satisfactory
6	Satisfactory
5	Nearly satisfactory
4	Unsatisfactory
3	Very unsatisfactory
2	Poor
1	Very poor

6.2 Assessment Criteria

Proposals submitted under this Call for Proposals are assessed on their merits against the following criteria.

1) Motivation, strategic relevance and alignment with the objective

- a. The proposal demonstrably aligns with the theme '*AI Lifecycle Compliance: RegGuides, RegTech and Supervisory Guidance*'. It meets the requirements set out in this Call for Proposals and addresses and substantiates concrete, recognisable questions arising from industry, in particular SMEs.
- b. The thematic choices made in respect of the structuring elements, namely (i) the *AI lifecycle phase* and (ii) the *human role in action and responsibility*, are clearly and convincingly justified on the basis of a demonstrable need from business.
- c. The sectoral theme, that is, the application domain or domains, is clearly and convincingly justified for each use case on the basis of a demonstrable need from the sector and the businesses and/or civil society organisations involved.
- d. The proposal convincingly describes how it contributes to answering the central research question.
- e. The proposal demonstrates that the RegGuides and RegTech to be developed contribute to operational certainty for organisations, and SMEs in particular, in complying with the AI Regulation.
- f. The proposal clearly describes how SMEs will be involved and how the collaboration between core partners and co-partners will be organised.

- g. The proposal describes how it is positioned relative to AiNed ELSA Labs, Innovation Labs and Learning Communities already funded, so that it offers clear added value to the existing AiNed portfolio.

2) Composition and organisation

- a. The composition of core partners and co-partners in the use cases meets the requirements set out in this Call for Proposals.
- b. The consortium is coherent and complementary. The roles, expertise and activities of the core partners and co-partners are clearly described and align with (i) the expertise required for the development and validation of RegGuide and RegTech prototypes, and (ii) experience with knowledge sharing, co-creation and transfer of results to business.
- c. There is a logical and balanced distribution of activities between core partners and co-partners.
- d. The consortium has a strong, logical and clearly designed organisational structure.
- e. Collaboration within the consortium is clearly structured through well-defined work packages.
- f. Each work package describes the roles and responsibilities of the partners involved.
- g. The proposal presents a committed lab management team, with a described approach and time commitment for each of the roles: lead applicant, Lab lead and Tech lead.
- h. The budget is realistic, detailed and aligned with the project objectives, with a substantiated cost breakdown per partner and per activity.
- i. The proposal has sufficient substantive flexibility to incorporate new research questions and, through use cases, new co-partners over its duration, and to respond to current developments in regulation and market need.
- j. There is a balanced allocation of budget between core partners and (future) co-partners.
- k. The first use case is fully elaborated in the form of a work package, in accordance with the submission requirements set out in Section 3.2 of this Call for Proposals ('Level of detail required at submission').

3) Impact and feasibility

- a. The proposal convincingly describes the feasibility of the proposed AiNed ELSA Lab.
- b. The proposal makes it plausible that the research, development and validation activities will lead to practically usable RegGuide and RegTech prototypes.
- c. The proposal demonstrates that it meets the output performance indicators (Section 3.5).
- d. The proposal describes the impact of the RegGuide and RegTech prototypes to be developed.
- e. The proposal identifies potential risks and presents mitigation strategies.
- f. The proposal explains how progress on feasibility, performance indicators, outcomes and impact will be monitored.
- g. The proposal describes how the RegGuides and RegTech developed can be generalised to organisations outside the consortium itself and are widely applicable to SMEs in comparable practical contexts.
- h. The proposal includes a fully developed sustainable exit strategy, showing how the ELSA Lab will continue to function once AiNed funding has ended and how the results developed will remain available.

4) Distinctive character, embedding and knowledge transfer

- a. The proposal demonstrates that it is clearly distinctive from, or complementary to, other initiatives and frameworks in the field of compliance with the AI Regulation, without overlap or duplication.
- b. The proposal shows that the ELSA Lab will actively participate in AIC4NL's thematic working area, 'Values, Norms and Regulation'.
- c. The proposal demonstrates how interim and final RegGuide and RegTech results will be shared with other ELSA Labs and other (AiNed) initiatives.
- d. The dissemination strategy is concrete and well substantiated, and includes activities aimed at the wider SME community, relevant supervisory authorities and policy actors, including substantive contributions to national and international networks focused on AI governance and regulation.
- e. The proposal describes its coherence with relevant AI hubs and working groups within AIC4NL, and demonstrates its added value and complementarity within the AI ecosystem.

6.3 Rules for Award

All applications are ranked on the basis of their total score, whereby a proposal must achieve the minimum qualification 'satisfactory' on every assessment criterion. The three highest-scoring applications are awarded funding within the available maximum budget (Section 1.5).

7 Monitoring Progress

Throughout the AiNed funding period, the lead applicant is responsible for the substantive and financial reporting on the AiNed ELSA Lab. There are several reporting moments, namely:

- on completion of each use case, for the determination of the grant awarded to the co-partners involved;
- annual reporting;
- final reporting, for the determination of the grant awarded to the core partners and any remaining co-partners.

Stichting AIC4NL will incorporate into the reporting templates any obligations imposed on it by the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO) that are relevant to these reports.

7.1 Reporting on Completion of a Use Case

Once a use case has been completed, the participating co-partners may apply for determination of the AiNed funding awarded to them. This determination procedure requires submission of a substantive and financial final report documenting the results achieved, the objectives met, and the justification of expenditure incurred.

Stichting AIC4NL and RVO assess the documentation submitted. RVO formally determines the final amount of funding. Both parties reserve the right to request additional documents or specifications in support of the determination request.

7.2 Annual Reporting

With a view to monitoring the progress of the AiNed ELSA Lab, Stichting AIC4NL will request substantive and financial reports on an annual basis. The lead applicant is required to submit periodic substantive and financial reports in accordance with the reporting guidelines set by Stichting AIC4NL. These reports are shared, in part, with RVO in order to meet accountability obligations.

Where the annual report indicates that the progress of the AiNed ELSA Lab does not meet the objectives, approach and key performance indicators set out in the project plan, the Board of Stichting AIC4NL may issue recommendations and initiate a discussion with the lead applicant, the Lab lead and the Tech lead. The consortium is then required to draw up an improvement plan and, where necessary, a revised budget, in order to meet the objectives, approach and key performance indicators set out in the project plan.

7.3 Final Reporting

On completion of the AiNed ELSA Lab, the lead applicant must submit a final report covering both substantive and financial accountability. This final report forms the basis for the final determination of the AiNed funding by RVO.

Stichting AIC4NL and RVO reserve the right to request additional documentation or specifications in support of this final report.

8 The Proposal

8.1 Pre-Proposal

The pre-proposal, or short proposal, constitutes a mandatory component intended to provide Stichting AIC4NL and other applicants with a concise and clear picture of the initiative. This short proposal is further refined and developed during the co-creation workshop, resulting in an intended proposal that is presented at a pitch session. The intended proposal is subsequently developed further into a full proposal.

The pre-proposal must address at least the following elements:

- A. Details of the lead applicant;
- B. General description, including a public summary;
- C. Substantive description;
- D. Details of the participant(s) in the co-creation workshop.

The pre-proposal is submitted via the form on the website of Stichting AIC4NL (<https://aic4nl.nl>). Of the short proposal, only the lead applicant's organisation (A) and the general description including the public summary (B) will be published on the AIC4NL website, in order to facilitate the co-creation process.

The following conditions apply to the short proposal:

- The short proposal is fully completed;
- The short proposal is submitted via the web form of Stichting AIC4NL (<https://aic4nl.nl>) and received before the stated deadline.

Where either of the above conditions is not met, the pre-proposal will not be taken into account in the selection and assessment procedure, and the proposal concerned will consequently not be eligible for funding.

8.2 Co-creation and Pitch

A co-creation workshop is held following submission of the pre-proposal. For the purposes of the co-creation workshop or workshops, the contact details of lead applicants are shared with the other lead applicants.

Following the co-creation workshop, a pitch session will be organised, at which Stichting AIC4NL provides feedback to support development of the full proposal. The template for the pitch will be made available by Stichting AIC4NL after the co-creation workshop.

The following conditions apply to participation in the co-creation workshop and the pitch session:

- For each short proposal submitted, at least the lead applicant, or a representative with written authorisation, must attend the co-creation workshop;
- For each short proposal submitted, at least the lead applicant, or a representative with written authorisation, must attend the pitch session.

If either of the above conditions is not met, the proposal will not be taken forward in the selection and assessment process, and the proposal in question will therefore not be eligible for funding.

8.3 Full Proposal

8.3.1 Eligibility Check

The full proposal consists of a fully completed 'Full Proposal Application Form' and 'Budget Form', which may be supplemented with letters of intent. Both documents will be available on the website of Stichting AIC4NL (<https://aic4nl.nl>) after the co-creation workshop, under the AiNed ELSA Lab programme component.

Stichting AIC4NL carries out an eligibility check on your full application against the following points:

- The application has been submitted via the website of Stichting AIC4NL (<https://aic4nl.nl>) or by email to elsalabs@aic4nl.nl;
- The full application was received before the applicable deadline;
- The full application was previously registered by means of a pre-proposal;
- The obligation to attend the co-creation session has been met;
- The obligation to attend the pitch session has been met;
- The application form, following any timely response to a request from AIC4NL for additions or amendments, is complete and has been completed in accordance with the instructions;
- The budget form has been prepared in accordance with the conditions of this Call for Proposals;
- The lead applicant and co-applicant(s) meet the stated conditions;
- The application meets the required matching percentage for own contributions;
- The application meets the structural requirements for an AiNed ELSA Lab, including the minimum number of partners required per type, a description of the lab management, and compliance of the consortium with the stated conditions;
- The requirements set out in the simultaneously published 'AiNed Rules of Engagement' document have been met.

A full application is only admitted to the assessment procedure if it meets these conditions. After submitting a full application, you are asked to remain available to make any administrative corrections needed in order to meet the submission conditions.

8.3.2 Application Form

The 'Full Proposal Application Form' forms the basis for the start of an AiNed ELSA Lab. It should present convincingly why, and in what way, your proposal contributes to the objectives of this call issued by Stichting AIC4NL under the AiNed National Growth Fund programme.

The application must include the following elements.

1. Summary.
2. Motivation, problem analysis, proposed solutions and impact.
3. Composition of the consortium and lab management.
4. Plan of approach.
5. Financial substantiation.
6. Contribution to the coherence of the AiNed programme as a whole.
7. Work packages.

Use of the 'Full Proposal Application Form', available on the website of Stichting AIC4NL (<https://aic4nl.nl>), is mandatory. The text of the application is confidential and is accessible only to Stichting AIC4NL, the assessment committee and the experts consulted.

The full proposal must not exceed 20 A4 pages, using a standard font (Calibri, 11pt), single line spacing and standard margins. This page limit excludes the cover page, the summary and the work packages (a maximum of one page per work package). Applicants are asked to keep to the essentials and to write concisely.

Annexes may be added where needed. These are supporting material only and do not form part of the assessment carried out by the experts consulted or the independent committee. The application must be readable and self-contained on the basis of elements 1 to 7 listed above.

9 Disclaimer

Please note that, following a successful assessment of proposals by Stichting AIC4NL, a formal review and funding decision procedure is carried out by RVO. RVO assesses the selected proposals on legal and administrative grounds before proceeding to final award of AiNed funding.

While every effort is made to keep the process as swift and smooth as possible, unforeseen circumstances may arise that affect progress. As a result, Stichting AIC4NL may not always be able to adhere to the intended timeline set out in this Call for Proposals.

Stichting AIC4NL reserves the right to unilaterally amend, supplement or revise this Call for Proposals at any time. Any such change takes effect from the moment it is published on the website of Stichting AIC4NL (<https://aic4nl.nl/>).

This document was originally drawn up in Dutch. The English translation is made available for those who do not have full command of Dutch. In the event of any difference in interpretation between the English and Dutch versions of this document, the original Dutch version prevails.

10 Contact Information

For questions about this Call for Proposals, please contact elsalabs@aic4nl.nl.