Circular Bio-Based Business models to create high-value Bio-based products in integrated value chains

Project type	RIA – Research Innovation Action		
Project number	101135323		
Project start date	1/01/2024	Duration	48 months

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C4B – OPEN CALL FOR PILOT PROJECTS

CALL FACT SHEET

Call Title	C4B Open Call for Pilot Projects (FSTP)
Project Acronym	C4B (Circular Bio-Based Business models to create high-value Bio-based products in integrated value chains)
Grant Agreement	No. 101135323
Call Reference	101135323
Opening Date	1st June 2026
Closing Date	14th August 2026 at 17:00 CET
Total Budget	€ 480,000
Max Funding per Project	€ 60,000
Number of Projects funded	8
Expected Duration	Up to 12 Months
Expected Implementation	1st January 2027 – 31st December 2027
Target Audience (non-exhaustive list)	Groups of farmers, foresters or other primary producers in rural areas, Biorefinery SMEs, Agricultural and forestry industry, Other biobased industry, Sector organizations, Entities representing combinations of the above
Information and templates	https://www.c4b-project.eu/c4b-open-call-get-ready-to-apply/
Submission	https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/runner/C4BOpenCall
Questions & Support Contact	c4bopencall@apre.it

1 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

1.1 Project Overview

The **C4B project** (*Circular Bio-Based Business models to create high-value Bio-based products in integrated value chains*) is a Horizon Europe project aimed at accelerating the development of rural communities and their economic viability by developing new fair and sustainable bio-based business models for different agricultural and forestry value chains. C4B business models have been designed to balance the share of power and profits and to enhance the cooperation among farmers, foresters and industry. This project is advancing the understanding of bio-based value chains by carrying out a holistic analysis of different case studies in the EU that considers technological aspects, the business environment, firm behaviour and cooperation, contractual agreements and ownership, and sustainability.

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1.2 Objective of the Call

The main objective of the **C4B Open Call** is to demonstrate the applicability, scalability and replicability of the generalised business models developed in different business settings and geographical areas, eventually stimulating the uptake of the business models developed in the project. This will be done by helping businesses:

- to assess the feasibility of implementing the business models in their specific business case, and
- to tailor the business models to their specific needs.

By providing financial support to Third Parties, the C4B aims to reach the following outcomes:

- Business models developed in C4B are validated by means of specific business cases
- Business models developed in C4B are tailored to specific needs of the Open Call participants
- Insights are provided for C4B which will be used in outlining policy recommendations on:
  - drivers and barriers in applying, scaling up and replicating business models
  - how sustainable fair models can be scaled up.

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2 SCOPE OF THE CALL

2.1 The target Value Chains

Proposals of **C4B Open Call** must address the valorisation of by-products within one (or more) of the following C4B target value chains, without prejudice to the addressing of similar value chains if duly explained:

Forestry:

- Valorisation of woody by-products from forestry and sawmilling, including biorefinery to produce:
  - Biocarbon
  - Volatile aromatic compounds
  - Pyrolysis oil

Agri-food:

- Valorisation of agricultural and processing by-products through biorefinery, including:
  - Platform chemicals like Hydroxymethylfurfural (HMF), 2,5-Furandicarboxylic acid (FDCA) from starchy agricultural inputs like potatoes and from fruit orchards
  - Polyphenols, bioactive ingredients from winemaking residues
  - Biochar from agricultural and processing by-products

Peatlands:

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- Valorisation of by-products from wetlands, including:
  - Platform chemicals like HMF, furfural
  - Lignin
  - Biochar

2.2 The target Business Models

Proposals in the Open Call must demonstrate the applicability, scalability and replicability of the circular and fair business models of the C4B project. All business models are promoting circularity and fairness, but at the same time they vary in the way that they create, deliver and capture value. Some of them are based on small-scale (on-farm) biorefinery, while others are based on centralised large-scale operations. The business models also vary in the type of products and services that they create. Most of them produce biobased chemicals, biochar, and/or polyphenols, others also produce eco-system services. The way that farmers are recognised as value creators also differs as some business models include e.g. regional branding. The business models are summarized below to better clarify what is meant by "value chains" within the C4B Open Call.

They showcase how different types of biomasses can be valorised through innovative bio-based business models.

2.2.1 Business models related to Forestry

1. Forestry Residue for Essential Oils and Hydrosol Extraction Model

The Forestry Residue Essential Oils and Hydrosol Extraction Model upcycles woody biomass into essential oils and aromatic waters (hydrosol) before combustion, capturing premium value from forestry residues. A centralized, medium-to-large biorefinery (BioHub) pre-treats and extracts bioactive compounds from woody biomass, supplied by regional foresters. Partnerships with CHP (Combined Heat and Power) plants or other organisations with left-over heat and technology experts enable industrial symbiosis and efficient resource use.

Revenue is captured through the sale of essential oils and aromatic waters (hydrosol), post-extraction biomass reuse (e.g., mulch or fuel), and energy production. Additional income may come from sustainability funding. The model's circularity supports low-waste use of local forest resources. Fairness is promoted through joint problem-solving and a focus on quality and support, ensuring equitable benefits for foresters and biorefineries while strengthening the regional bioeconomy.

To sum up:

- **Feedstock:** Woody residues from forestry operations and biomass plants.
- **Processing:** Pre-treatment and extraction of volatile aromatic compounds through steam distillation
- **Outputs:** Essential oils, hydrosol, and post-extraction biomass fractions.

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- **Value chain actors:** Forestry cooperatives, biomass plants, BioHub operators, technology providers, industrial end-users.
- **Governance:** Centralised BioHub governance with cooperative agreements, long-term supply contracts, and shared decision-making mechanisms.

2. Industrial Biocarbon from Forestry Substitution Model

The Industrial Biocarbon Substitution Model replaces fossil carbon with high-quality biocarbon derived from forestry byproducts, such as sawdust, to produce fossil-free biocarbon for industries like metallurgy. Through pyrolysis, sawdust is converted into biocarbon, syngas, and pyrolysis oil, processed in a centralized biorefinery (BioHub) that operates within an industrial symbiosis framework. Partnerships with combined heat and power (CHP) plants and metallurgical industries ensure efficient resource use and energy offsetting.

Revenue is captured through the sale of industrial biocarbon and byproducts, while the model's circularity reduces CO_2 emissions and waste. Fairness is promoted via adaptive pricing for sawdust, which supports foresters and sawmills, and through responsive communication and relational quality in partnerships. The model also creates rural jobs and strengthens regional industrial linkages, contributing to a more sustainable and interconnected bioeconomy.

To sum up:

- **Feedstock:** Sawdust and forestry by-products.
- **Processing:** Pyrolysis to produce biocarbon, syngas, and pyrolysis oil.
- **Outputs:** Industrial-grade biocarbon, syngas, pyrolysis oil.
- **Value chain actors:** Sawmills, BioHub operators, CHP plants, metallurgical industries.
- **Governance:** Industrial symbiosis framework with transparent pricing, adaptive contracts, and coordinated resource flows.

2.2.2 Business models related to Agri-food

3. Cereal Residue Valorisation Model

The Cereal Residue Valorisation Model transforms cereal residues, such as wheat straw, corn stems, cobs, and leaves, into higher-value bio-based products, including absorbent bedding materials. A moderately large cooperative processes residues, converting them into products with energy, fertilizer, or filtration value.

Revenue streams include sales of absorbent bedding, biochar, biogas, digestate, and potential funding from circular economy schemes. The model's high circularity valorises agricultural residues that would otherwise be wasted. Fairness is ensured through cultural adaptation, supply chain socialisation, and collaborative communication, which enhance equity for cereal farmers and cooperatives. The model supports regional circular economy initiatives and sustainable agriculture.

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To sum up:

- **Feedstock:** Cereal residues such as wheat straw, corn stems, cobs, and leaves.
- **Processing:** Biorefinery operations, composting, pyrolysis, and anaerobic digestion.
- **Outputs:** Absorbent bedding materials.
- **Value chain actors:** Farmers, cooperatives, processing SMEs, energy producers.
- **Governance:** Cooperative governance with shared facilities, collective decision-making, and equitable benefit-sharing.

4. Milling Residue Functional Food/Nutraceuticals Model

The Milling Residue Functional Food/Nutraceutical Model extracts and valorises high-added-value ingredients, such as semi-processed soluble fibre complexes with prebiotic properties, from wheat and corn milling residues. Regional mills process residues into nutraceutical ingredients, with farms supplying cereals for milling. Byproducts like glucose syrup and residual fibres are also sold.

Revenue is generated from soluble fibre sales, and byproducts like glucose syrup. The model's circularity reduces waste, avoids land use for dedicated raw materials, and promotes the efficient use of milling residues. Fairness is supported through cultural adaptation, supply chain socialisation, and risk-sharing, which boost equity for cereal farmers and mills. The model also creates jobs, develops local skills, and diversifies regional economies.

To sum up:

- **Feedstock:** Wheat and corn milling residues.
- **Processing:** Extraction and refinement of soluble fibre complexes and other bioactive ingredients.
- **Outputs:** Soluble fibres with prebiotic properties, glucose syrup, residual fibres.
- **Value chain actors:** Mills, farmers, functional food manufacturers, nutraceutical companies, processing SMEs.
- **Governance:** Collaborative governance with risk-sharing mechanisms and transparent contracting between mills and suppliers.

5A. Small-scale Cooperative Potato Residue Valorisation Model

The Cooperative Potato Residue Valorisation Model converts potato residues, such as peels, rejects, and pomace, into HMF, an organic compound considered a green chemical, through small-scale on-farm biorefineries. Local cooperatives of potato farmers supply residues, while partnerships with CHP plants enable energy-efficient processing. This model emphasizes local valorisation, reducing transport emissions and waste.

Revenue streams include HMF and byproduct sales, such as char and pulp. The circular approach supports rural economies by creating local jobs and strengthening community ties.

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Fairness is enhanced through profit and risk-sharing, explicit contracting, and social monitoring within cooperatives, ensuring equitable benefits for all participants.

To sum up:

- **Feedstock:** Potato peels, rejects, and pomace.
- **Processing:** Small-scale on-farm biorefinery processes for HMF production.
- **Outputs:** HMF, char, pulp.
- **Value chain actors:** Potato farmers, cooperatives, CHP plants, chemical industry.
- **Governance:** Farmer-led cooperative governance with shared investments, profit-sharing, and local decision-making.

5B. Centralised Industrial Potato Residue Valorisation Model

The Centralised Industrial Potato Residue Valorisation Model scales the valorisation of potato residues into HMF, targeting large industrial processors. A centralized biorefinery processes residues from potato processing companies, with growers potentially supplying additional raw materials. Industrial symbiosis with CHP plants improves energy efficiency and reduces emissions.

Revenue is captured through HMF and byproduct sales, while the model's circularity enables the valorisation of large residue volumes. Fairness is promoted through fair negotiation procedures, transparent trading practices, and collaborative communication, ensuring that potato farmers benefit equitably. The model also fosters technological learning, innovation, and regional partnerships, strengthening the bioeconomy.

To sum up:

- **Feedstock:** Potato residues from industrial processing.
- **Processing:** Centralised biorefinery operations for HMF production.
- **Outputs:** HMF and secondary by-products.
- **Value chain actors:** Industrial processors, growers, BioHub operators, chemical industry.
- **Governance:** Centralised governance with fair negotiation procedures, transparent trading practices, and coordinated supply agreements.

6. On-Farm Biorefinery for Apple Residues Model

The On-Farm Biorefinery Model for Apple Residues upscales apple pomace into green chemicals, such as HMF, through non-food competing biomass valorisation. Small (on-farm) biorefineries process pomace via acid hydrolysis into HMF, with local cooperatives of apple growers and juicers supplying raw materials. This localized approach minimizes transport emissions and maximizes circularity.

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Revenue is generated from the sale of HMF and byproducts like char and pulp. The model's environmental benefits include waste reduction and the valorisation of agricultural residues, which would otherwise be discarded. Fairness is ensured through profit and risk-sharing, quality support, and trust-building within cooperatives, stabilizing employment and fostering innovation in rural agro-processing sectors.

To sum up:

- **Feedstock:** Apple pomace from juice and cider production.
- **Processing:** Acid hydrolysis and small-scale biorefinery operations.
- **Outputs:** HMF, char, pulp.
- **Value chain actors:** Apple growers, cooperatives, on-farm processing units, industrial end-users.
- **Governance:** Cooperative governance with trust-building mechanisms, shared responsibilities, and equitable benefit-sharing.

7. Regional Supply of 70% Purity Polyphenol from Grape Pomace for Supplements Valorisation Model

The Regional Polyphenol from Grape Pomace Valorisation Model focuses on the extraction and sustainable valorisation of high-value polyphenols from grape pomace, a byproduct of winemaking, for food, nutraceutical, or cosmetic use. By leveraging extraction, purification, and refining technologies, this model transforms winery residues into high value polyphenols. Collaboration between regional distilleries and wineries enables shared infrastructure, such as biorefineries built on existing facilities, reducing costs and maximizing resource efficiency. Revenue is generated through the sale of polyphenol mixtures and leftover biomass for biogas, while the circular approach significantly reduces waste and environmental impact compared to synthetic alternatives.

Fairness is embedded through long-term contracts, joint planning, and transparent branding, which enhance trust and economic stability for local wineries. The model also strengthens regional cultural pride, supports the local economy, and promotes healthier end-user products, aligning with broader sustainability and innovation goals.

To sum up:

- **Feedstock:** Grape pomace from winemaking.
- **Processing:** Extraction, purification, and refinement of polyphenols.
- **Outputs:** Polyphenol mixtures, residual biomass for biogas.
- **Value chain actors:** Wineries, distilleries, cooperatives, cosmetic and nutraceutical industries.
- **Governance:** Cluster-based governance with shared infrastructure, long-term contracts, and transparent branding strategies.

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8. High Purity Cosmetic-Grade Polyphenol Extraction Cooperative from Grape Pomace Model

The Cosmetic-Grade Polyphenol Extraction Model focuses on the extraction and valorisation of high-purity cosmetic-grade polyphenols from grape pomace, a byproduct of regional winemaking. On-farm biorefineries or cooperative structures process pomace, with regional wineries supplying residues. Byproducts are sold for biogas, and processing costs are shared among participants.

Revenue comes from the sale of polyphenol mixtures and residues for biogas. The model's circularity reduces waste and environmental impact, offering a sustainable alternative to synthetic antioxidants. Fairness is enhanced through the formation of a cooperative. Trust, and collaborative communication, which strengthen the relationship between individual wineries in the cooperative, and supply chain socialisation practices are important. The model also promotes healthier end-user products and supports the local economy.

To sum up:

- **Feedstock:** Grape pomace from regional wineries.
- **Processing:** Extraction and purification of high-purity cosmetic-grade polyphenols.
- **Outputs:** High-purity polyphenols, residues for biogas.
- **Value chain actors:** Wineries, cooperatives, cosmetic industry, processing SMEs.
- **Governance:** Cooperative governance with shared processing costs, trust-building practices, and collective decision-making.

2.2.3 Business models related to Peatlands

9. Wetland Biomass Biorefinery and Ecosystem Services Model

The Wetland Biomass Biorefinery Model upcycles low-quality wetland hay into valuable products, including HMF, furfural, lignin, and hydrochar. A large, potentially cooperatively owned biorefinery processes hay from a group of farmers, partnering with CHP plants to maximize efficiency. This model supports wetland restoration and ecosystem services including rewetting peatlands while providing fossil-free alternatives.

Revenue is generated from the sale of HMF, biochar, lignin, furfural, and residual heat. The circular approach reduces waste and air pollution, contributing to a healthier environment. Fairness is ensured through collaborative communication, quality support, and contact channels, which boost equity for wetland farmers and biorefineries. The model also creates rural jobs and supports nature conservation goals.

To sum up:

- **Feedstock:** Wetland biomass (hay) from peatland management.
- **Processing:** Biorefinery operations producing HMF, furfural, lignin, and hydrochar.

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- **Outputs:** Platform chemicals, biochar, lignin-based products, residual heat.
- **Value chain actors:** Farmers, farmer cooperatives, biorefineries, CHP plants, industrial end-users.
- **Governance:** Cooperative governance aligned with conservation goals, potentially integrating ecosystem services and carbon market participation.

2.3 Expected Activities

Applicants are expected to propose a **Pilot Project** that demonstrates in real cases the feasibility of a C4B Bio-based Business Model. For the purpose of the current Open Call it is recommended that at least a TRL 4-5 is in place in proposed applications to properly address the activities listed below.

Proposals should address the **mandatory activities of tailoring and assessment** outlined below:

1. Tailoring a C4B business model to a specific business case (i.e. Development of a specific business case and governance structure on the basis of business models developed in C4B)
2. Assessment of the feasibility of the business model, including at least two of the following:
   - Assessment of technological feasibility
   - Assessment of the governance structure and fairness
   - Assessment of economic feasibility, market research
   - Assessment of environmental, economic and social costs and benefits
   - Where applicable, assessment of contribution to restoring carbon content in soil, increasing nutrients, revitalising marginal lands or ensuring food security.

Note: a strong proposal should demonstrate both the adaptation of the business model to a specific context (tailoring) and a credible, comprehensive assessment of its feasibility; the proposal should not be theoretical but implemented in real case scenario.

Applicants can propose any additional, complementary activities, but not limited to, as for the list below:

- Upgrade of digital platforms, if any or if needed
- Establishing a stakeholder network and engagement mechanisms
- Implement lessons learnt and recommendations from the capacity building activities conducted in C4B
- Participation to/organisation of events, workshops, etc.

2.4 The Capacity Building Program (Support Services)

In addition to financial support, selected beneficiaries will receive **non-financial support** through a dedicated **Capacity Building Program**. C4B Consortium partners will provide:

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- **Informative Sessions:** each use case will receive more detailed information on the C4B business model they applied for and on activities that should be carried out to successfully complete the validation process. This information will be delivered in the form of webinars (at least one webinar per use case).
- **Coaching:** tailored coaching activities will be implemented to guide the use cases in their day-to-day validation process. This will be a continuous process where each use case will be assigned to a coach (coming from C4B partners) and will have the possibility to ask specific questions concerning the business model assessment and validation process, discuss potential implementation problems, risk factors and mitigation solutions. To have a better understanding of the possible support activities, please refer to the FAQ (https://www.c4b-project.eu/c4b-open-call-get-ready-to-apply/)
- **Networking:** at least one online workshop with all use cases will be organised to give the floor to discuss common issues related to the business models.

Note: the abovementioned activities and sessions (support services) are subject to the C4B project Grant Agreement, therefore are not meant to be part of applicants' proposal. Accordingly, the frequency of informative sessions, the amount of information, the number of coaching activities and all other operational aspects are up to C4B consortium decision and management.

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3 FINANCIAL SUPPORT

3.1 Budget and Funding Rate

- **Total Budget: € 480,000**
- **Maximum grant amount per project: € 60,000**.
- **Maximum number of projects granted: 8**
- **Funding rate:** 100% of eligible costs.
- **Form of Funding: Lump Sum**.
    - *Note: The grant will be paid as a fixed amount upon the successful completion of the defined activities. Beneficiaries will not be asked to report actual costs (timesheets, invoices) but must demonstrate the technical implementation of the action.*

3.2 Payment Schedule

Payments will be released according to the following scheme (indicative):

- **Pre-financing: 45%** upon signature of the Sub-grant Agreement (January 2027, M1 of projects' implementation).
- **Interim Payment: 35%** upon approval of the Interim Report (July 2027, M7 of projects' implementation in case of 12-months projects; after 50% of projects' completion in case of different duration).

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- **Final Payment: 20%** upon approval of the Final Report (by 30 days after December 2027, M12 of projects' implementation in case of 12-months projects; by 30 days after the full projects' completion in case of different duration).

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4 ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

4.1 Eligible Applicants

- **Legal Status:** The applicant(s) must be a legal entity (e.g., SME, Start-up, Spin-off, Research Organisation, etc.).
  - *Note: in case of consortium, the maximum number of allowed partners is 3*
- **Location[1]:** Applicants must be established in one of the:
  - EU Member States (including overseas countries and territories).
  - Horizon Europe Associated Countries.
- **Conflict of Interest:** Partners of the C4B Consortium are **not eligible** to apply.
- **Single Submission**: Applicants must submit only one proposal. Multiple submissions by the same entity (or consortium) will result in the rejection of all involved proposals.

4.2 Admissibility Requirements

- Proposals must be submitted in **English**.
  - *Note: all activities, documentation, reports, meetings, will be carried out and/or produced in English*
- Proposals must be submitted via the official online submission system by the deadline.
- Proposals must be complete and respect the page limit (max 10 pages).
- Pilot projects' expected duration is up to 12 months. Proposals can indicate a shorter implementation period, but those indicating an implementation period longer than 12 months will be considered ineligible.

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5 APPLICATION PROCEDURE

5.1 Proposal Submission

Proposals must be submitted exclusively online through the **C4B Application** page available at this link. Applications submitted via email or other means will **not** be accepted.

- *Note: in the case of joint applications (i.e. consortia),* ***only a single proposal must be submitted on behalf of the consortium****. The proposal must be submitted by one of the consortium partners designated as the "Lead Applicant", who will act as the representative for all members.*

[1] Eligible countries described in **Annex B** of Horizon Europe Work Programme 2026-2027 General Annexes

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5.2 Application Documents

A complete application consists of the following mandatory parts, to be provided in English:

1. the **administrative data (Part A)**, filled online at this link
2. the **technical description of the pilot project and the budget estimation (Part B)**, filled in the provided template, saved as PDF and uploaded along with Part A.

Formatting Rules:

- **Language:** English.
- **Format:** PDF.
- **Page Limit:** The technical part must not exceed **10 pages:**
  - Excess pages will be disregarded.

Note: further formatting guidelines and details are included in Part B.

5.3 Modification Policy

Applicants can modify their application as many times as they need **before the deadline**. Once the application is submitted via the official page, applicants will see a confirmation message containing a **unique contribution ID** and a **direct link** to the "edit contribution" page. If they need to update or correct any information, applicants can use the specific link and ID provided to access and edit their existing entry.

5.4 Multiple Submissions

- Applicants are allowed to submit **only one proposal** under this Call.
- **Strict Eligibility Rule:** If a legal entity submits more than one proposal (or is involved in more than one application), **all proposals associated with that entity will be declared inadmissible and will be automatically rejected** without further evaluation.
- It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that they are not listed in multiple proposals before the deadline.

5.5 Deadline

The deadline for submission is **14th August 2026 at 17:00 CET (Brussels Time)**. Late submissions will be automatically rejected by the system. We strongly recommend submitting your proposal a few days in advance to avoid last-minute technical issues.

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6 EVALUATION AND SELECTION

6.1 Evaluation and selection schedule

Stage	Date/duration
Evaluation	14st September – 31st October 2026

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Receipt of Evaluation Summary Reports by all applicants	By 15th November 2026
Invitation to Sub-Grant Agreement Preparation to the 8 winning use-case consortia	By 15th November 2026
Sub-Grant Agreement Preparation phase for the 8 winning use-case projects	One month from the receipt of the invitation to GAP by the 8 winning use case projects
Sub-Grants signed	By 18th December 2026

6.2 Award Criteria

The proposals will be evaluated and ranked according to a clear set of weighted criteria and thresholds:

- **Concept Description (Maximum score: 15 / Threshold: 10)**
  - Clearness, i.e., intended or existing biorefinery concept is clearly described (clearer descriptions are awarded more points)
  - Involvement of primary production both as project partner or as external stakeholders, i.e., type and number of farms / primary producers
  - Description of the potential or already in-place organizational structures that favour the set-up of sustainable business models for farmers, e.g., cooperatives (possible involvement of organic farmers to be described).
- **Technical Excellence (Maximum score: 15 / Threshold: 10)**
  - Innovativeness of the technologies described (possible uptake from previous R&D&I initiatives to be described)
  - The expected volumes to be processed at the biorefinery of waste, by-products and residues from agriculture, forestry, and the agri-food industry are significant and clearly described.
  - Quality of the project plan and budget, including capacity and team expertise, i.e., clarity, relevance and feasibility of the proponents, the work plan and appropriateness of the budget and resources and their consistency with the work plan.
- **Impact (Maximum score: 30 / Threshold: 20)**
  A quantitative and qualitative indication of the expected impact of the project in terms of:
  - Environmental Impact
  - Social Impact
  - Economic Impact
- **Scalability (Maximum score: 20 / Threshold: 10)**
  - Scalability and growth potential (size of the necessary investments and any subsidies to be described)
  - Potential further environmental impact in the targeted sector in the EU
  - Potential further social impact in the targeted sector in the EU
  - Potential further economic impact in the targeted sector in the EU

1–5 score is assigned to each of the criteria listed above, but some criteria, as shown in table 1, are weighted differently according to their importance. For each criterion a maximum of 5 points can be given:
1 = Poor (the criterion is inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses)

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2 = Fair (the criterion is broadly addressed, but there are significant weaknesses)
3 = Good (the criterion is addressed well, but a number of shortcomings are present)
4 = Very good (the criterion is addressed very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present)
5 = Excellent (the criterion is successfully addressed. Any shortcomings are minor)

- **Bonus points:**
  - **Bonus 1**: The proposal clearly intends providing contribution to restoring carbon content in soil, increasing nutrients, revitalizing marginal lands or ensuring food security (Max 2.5 points).
  - **Bonus 2**: The proposal clearly promotes the organic farming (Max 2.5 points)
  - **Bonus 3**: The proposal uptakes results from EU or national R&D&I initiatives (Max 2.5 points)
  - **Bonus 4**: The proposal clearly sets credible long-term pathways towards the prevention and removal of pollution (Max 2.5 points)

Criteria		Points	Weight	Total (points x weight)	Minimum Pass Score
Concept description				**Max 15**	**Min 10**
1.1	Clearness	1-5	1	Max 5	
1.2	Involvement of primary production	1-5	1	Max 5	
1.3	Organizational structures	1-5	1	Max 5	
Technical Excellence				**Max 15**	**Min 10**
2.1	Innovativeness	1-5	1	Max 5	
2.2	Quality of the proposed solution	1-5	1	Max 5	
2.3	Quality of the project plan, budget and proponent(s)	1-5	1	Max 5	
Impact				**Max 30**	**Min 20**
3.1	Environmental	1-5	2	Max 10	
3.2	Social	1-5	2	Max 10	
3.3	Economic	1-5	2	Max 10	
Scalability				**Max 20**	**Min 10**
4.1	Scalability and growth potential	1-5	1	Max 5	
4.2	Potential environmental impact in the targeted sector	1-5	1	Max 5	
4.3	Potential social impact in the targeted sector	1-5	1	Max 5	
4.4	Potential economic impact in the targeted sector	1-5	1	Max 5	
Bonus Points				**Max 10**	**Min 0**
TOTAL				**Max 90**	**Min 50**

6.3 Evaluation Process

1. **Eligibility Check:** Verification of administrative requirements.
2. **Expert Evaluation:** Each proposal found eligible in step 1 will be evaluated by **3** independent experts based on the Award Criteria.
3. **Score & Consensus**: the final score for each proposal is determined as follows:
   - **Consistent Scores**: If the total scores assigned by the three independent experts are consistent (difference between the highest and lowest scores is **≤15 points**), the final score will be the average of the three.

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- **Consensus Meeting**: If there is a discrepancy of **more than 15 points** between the highest and lowest scores AND at least two of the experts have scored the proposal above the threshold, a consensus meeting will be organized to agree on a final score.
- **Below Threshold**: If at least two experts score the proposal below the threshold, no consensus is required, and the final score for this part will be the average.

Each applicant/consortia will receive their final score, along with a complete Evaluation Summary Report including the explanation from the evaluation process.
The list of applications (only name of the proposal) with their total score will be public available.

6.3.1 General rules for selection

- **Overall Threshold**: applicants must reach a minimum score awarded (50/90).
- **Knock-out Rule:** If a proposal receives a score **below the threshold** in ANY of the four criteria (e.g., scoring 9/15 in Concept Description, but the maximum in the three other criteria), it will be **automatically rejected**, regardless of the total score.

6.4 Ranking and shortlisting

6.4.1 Ranking process

At the end of the evaluation phase a ranking list will be established by aggregating the final scores assigned to each eligible proposals. Proposals will be ordered from the highest to the lowest score. To ensure a broad validation of C4B Business Models, the final selection of the 8 funded use case projects will be guided by a **Business Model diversity objective**:

- The **8 available slots** will be allocated to the highest-ranked proposals (above the minimum threshold) that address different business models among the 9 available.
- If a specific BM is not addressed by any proposal above the minimum threshold, the remaining slot(s) will be reallocated to the next highest-ranked proposal(s) in the general list, even if they address a Business Model already covered.

6.4.2 Reserve list and substitution

A reserve list (shortlist) will be established to ensure full budget absorption and maximize the call impact. In the event of:

- Official withdrawal by a selected proposal;
- Technical or administrative non-compliance identified during the contracting phase;
- Failure to respond to the formal invitation within the specified deadline;

the C4B consortium will proceed to invite proposals from the reserve list, following the established ranking order and the **business model diversity objective** (see Section 6.4.1).

6.4.3 Priority in case of equal scores (Tie-break criteria)

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In the event that two or more applications receive the same total score, the following priority criteria will be applied to determine the final ranking:

- If any, proposal with the same score will be prioritised according to the scores they have been awarded for 'Impact'. When these scores are equal, priority will be based on scores for 'Technical excellence'.
- If necessary, any further prioritisation will be based on geographical diversity, defined as the number of Member States or Associated Countries represented in the proposal, not otherwise receiving funds from projects higher up the ranking list.
- If necessary, any further prioritisation will be based on diversity of the sectors (e.g., wood, wine, apples, potatoes, cereals, peatland), not otherwise covered from projects higher up the ranking list.
- If necessary, the gender balance among the personnel named in the proposal who will be primarily responsible for carrying out the activities will be used as a factor for prioritisation.
- If a distinction still cannot be made, the panel may decide to further prioritise by considering other factors related to the objectives of the Open Call.

7 OBLIGATIONS OF BENEFICIARIES

7.1 Sub-grant Agreement

Selected applicants will sign a **Sub-grant Agreement** with **APRE (Agency for the Promotion of European Research)**, acting as the C4B Granting Authority.

7.2 Projects' implementation period and expected duration

The pilot projects may start from **1 January 2027** and will have an indicative duration of up to 12 months. They must be completed **no later than 31 December 2027**.

7.3 Mandatory Activities

Beneficiaries must:

- Meet online every 3 months with selected partners from C4B project as part of their implementation, to discuss and assess:
  - Financial performance
  - Use cases' progress against their action plan
- Prepare and submit interim and final reports on their progress and achievements
- Share data and collaborate with C4B consortium to analyse the validation results for the purpose of the awarded C4B Open Call project
- Participation to the capacity building activities organized by C4B (see Section 2.3)
- Collaborate in publications of results, whenever possible considering data anonymization requirements and IP considerations

7.4 Data Protection

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Personal data will be processed in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR).

8 SUPPORT

For any questions regarding the call requirements or the submission process, please contact:

- **Information, details & FAQ Page:** https://www.c4b-project.eu/c4b-open-call-get-ready-to-apply/
- **Email:** c4bopencall@apre.it

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