



# Up2Circ Guide for Evaluators

This document provides evaluators with instructions on how to assess Up2Circ applications.

In its first open call, Up2Circ Accelerator will support up to 47 projects to validate the adoption of circular business models and implement concrete actions towards circular products, processes and services. The budget allocation for the call is €1.230.000.

**Call opening:** April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024

**Call closure:** May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024, 23:59 CET

**Online briefing:** May 29<sup>th</sup>, 2024, 10:30 to 12:00 CET

**Evaluation period:** from June 3<sup>rd</sup> to July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024

**Online Evaluators and Ethics Advisory Board meeting:** September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024, 13:00 to 15:00 CET

**Announcement of results:** by September 6<sup>th</sup>, 2024

## Content

1. About Up2Circ and its objectives .....	2
2. Your role .....	2
3. Eligible applicants .....	3
4. Eligible activities .....	4
5. Eligible costs .....	5
6. How to evaluate applications .....	6
7. Evaluator selection and deadlines .....	9
8. Conflict of interest .....	9
9. Confidentiality .....	9

# 1. About Up2Circ and its objectives

[Up2Circ](#) is a project funded by the European Commission's Horizon Europe programme with the overall objective to accelerate and scale the transition of European SMEs towards a circular economy. Up2Circ covers the entire value chain from awareness raising, education and training, tailored advisory service to funding of concrete transition projects towards a circular economy. The Up2Circ-Accelerator aims to mobilise and enable SMEs for the uptake of circular business models, circular product design and circular processes. It accompanies SMEs with a client-centric, customised advisory approach from exploration of opportunities to concrete implementation projects along the circular strategies to narrow (use less), slow (use longer), close (use again), regenerate (make clean) and inform (use data) material and energy flows.

Up2Circ encourages the uptake of advanced technologies and social innovation as enablers and drivers of a successful transition towards a modern, digitalized, resource-efficient and competitive circular economy. Advanced technologies like new materials, digitalisation, industrial biotechnology and additive manufacturing can significantly support the transition to circularity and can increase competitiveness and resilience of enterprises as elaborated in [European Industrial Strategy](#). Social innovation is a key driver for economic success of circular transition as it enables businesses to fully develop their human capital potential and is essential to rethink and reshape current practices of producing and consuming to enhance resource efficiency while satisfying customers' needs.

Up2Circ focuses on innovation and transformation measures that individual SMEs can realistically achieve. Up2Circ especially targets SMEs that are not aware yet how they could best innovate to transform. That is why in the Up2Circ-Accelerator capacity building comes prior to funding and active participation in the '[Up2Circ Academy](#)' is an eligibility criterion for submission of proposals to this call.

Up2Circ Accelerator provides to selected SMEs funding of up to €15,000 for feasibility studies related to the adoption of circular business models or up to €50,000 to implement specific transition measures towards circular products, processes and services.

Evaluators are contracted by Tutech Innovation GmbH (hereinafter "Contractor") based on Up2Circ Contract for External Evaluators.

## 2. Your role

Each application is evaluated by three evaluators who work individually. Applications that receive a score above a threshold progress further, while those that do not are rejected. Successful applications are ranked separately for small scale and large scale projects according to the overall scores in descending order. The ranking is a subject to an online Evaluators and Ethics Advisory Board meeting with assigned evaluators, Ethics Advisor and Up2Circ project partner representatives who meet to discuss how to manage potential ethics issues and agree on the final list of selected applicants and a reserve list.

Your role is to perform the evaluation of the assigned proposals, namely:

- Assess the proposal on the basis of the following evaluation criteria set down in the Guidelines for Applicants: Concept, Feasibility and Impact.

- Provide comments for each criterion and score them on a scale from 0 to 5 (half point scores may be given).
- Provide comments on the whole proposal, highlighting: Strengths and Positive Aspects, Shortcomings, Recommendations.
- Carry out an ethics screening to detect if the projects proposed include ethically sensitive activities, such as processing of personal data, the use of AI- based applications and interactions with human subjects.
- Participate in individual consensus group meetings involving three evaluators assigned to the same proposal when a minimum 5-point difference between the total score given by the lowest and highest evaluation is detected for the proposal.
- Submit the evaluation within defined number of calendar days commencing from the date the application is assigned to you.
- Participate in an online Evaluators and Ethics Advisory Board meeting together with the Ethics Advisor and Up2Circ project partner representatives to discuss how to manage potential ethics issues and agree on the final list of selected applicants and a reserve list.

You are expected to use your technical and market expertise within your specialist field to provide objective assessments consisting of scores and justifications.

Your assessment must be in line with the objectives of Up2Circ and the eligibility criteria of the call. Knowing the objectives of Up2Circ and the eligibility criteria is a precondition for commencing your work. There will be an online briefing for evaluators to provide more information about the call objectives and evaluation process, including Q&A. The online briefing will be recorded and shared with evaluators who will not be able to participate.

### 3. Eligible applicants

Projects must be submitted by a single [SME](#)<sup>1</sup> from the EU Member States (EU 27) who meet the following two criteria related to their involvement in the Up2Circ Academy before the submission deadline:

- **Circularity Assessment:** Applicants must have completed the circularity assessment using the [Up2Circ Circularity Assessment Tool](#). For companies located outside the Up2Circ partner regions, the circularity assessment is completed online. For companies located in Up2Circ partner regions, the circularity assessment may also be completed offline with support of Up2Circ team.
- **Enhanced knowledge and expertise in circular economy:** Applicants must have actively participated in the [Up2Circ Academy](#) online learning programme. Active involvement is defined as having completed a minimum of 50% of the Up2Circ Academy e-learning modules.

Only one entity per proposal will be admitted, consortia will not be considered eligible.

Applicants are not allowed to submit multiple applications for this call. Only the last submitted application will be eligible in case there is more than one application submitted by one entity.

English is the official language for open calls. Proposals must be submitted in English to be eligible.

Proposals must be complete and contain all the requested information.

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<sup>1</sup> SME status should be checked by applicants using the [EU SME self-assessment questionnaire](#).

The Up2Circ partners, or their affiliates or employees, are not considered as eligible applicants and cannot apply for funding.

The eligibility check is carried out by Up2Circ consortium partners.

## 4. Eligible activities

The types of activities that can be implemented within the financial support must focus on the uptake of circular business models, circular product design and circular processes.

SMEs can apply for two different funding schemes based on the maturity of their transition projects:

### **Small scale projects: Feasibility studies**

Funding: small scale projects of up to €15.000

Expected number of funded small scale projects: 32

Project scope: In-depth validation of technical, economic and social aspects of adoption of circular business models, considering desirability, feasibility, viability and environmental aspects. Projects should focus on one or several circular business models such as circular supply chain, sharing platforms, product as a service, product life extension, recovery and recycling.

Expected outcome: feasibility study including a business plan

Project duration: 6 months

*Examples of potential projects:*

*Reform the use of resources by innovating toward a circular supply chain: A construction company explores the feasibility of implementing circular building practices.*

*Optimize capacity use by introducing a sharing platform model: A clothing retailer explores the feasibility of introducing a sharing platform for evening dresses.*

*Offer outcome-oriented solutions with shifting to a product as a service business model: A manufacturer of industrial tools explores the feasibility of shifting from selling products to an access-oriented business model with recurring fees or to a pay-per-use model.*

*Product life extension: An ICT service provider explores feasibility of offering a new service portfolio on office equipment life extension through repair, maintenance, upgrading, resale or remanufacturing.*

*Innovating towards recovery and recycling: A food and beverage producer explores the feasibility of implementing a closed-loop waste management system.*

*Assessing the full potential of circular economy opportunities by exploring application opportunities of several of the above-mentioned circular business model types along the value chain: A logistics company explores the feasibility of setting up a zero-emission logistics offer by shifting to renewable energy sources, exploring opportunities of low or zero-emission transport modes, cooperating with other logistics companies on shared use of vehicle fleet and on optimization of transport capacities, exploring opportunities for life extension of fleet and equipment, optimizing tire management and exploring opportunities to cooperate for tire reuse and recycling as well as for CO2 compensation projects.*

### **Large scale projects: Piloting and demonstration**

Funding: large scale projects of up to €50.000

Expected number of funded large scale projects: 15

Project scope: Pilot and demonstration activities to implement concrete transition measures towards circularity through the implementation of certain technologies, a shift to circular product design, introduction of new products, processes and services. Projects should focus on prototyping, pilot testing, implementation of new business processes, solutions and systems.

Expected outcome: validated prototype

Project duration: 12 months

*Examples of potential projects:*

*A SME manufacturer of construction materials conducts a pilot testing of a new material for circularity using recycled waste streams as an input.*

*A cosmetic SME develops and tests a new circular product line, using biodegradable and compostable packaging and integrating waste streams as ingredients.*

*A fashion SME conducts pilot testing of a new collection and recovery system, implementing a take-back program for old clothing and the use of recycled materials in new product lines.*

*A plastic SME develops and tests a new circular production process, using recycled plastics and integrating the internal cascade use of process by-products.*

*A textile dyeing SME conducts pilot testing of a new water treatment process, reusing treated wastewater in production processes.*

*A SME explores eco-design opportunities and prototypes new products made with bio-based materials from the valorisation of agro-industrial waste.*

*An agricultural SME develops and tests applications for valorisation of residues from olive oil extraction.*

*Based on a Life Cycle Assessment a SME manufacturer of consumer electronics optimizes product design, considering reduction of material and energy input during production and use, repairability, reuse, remanufacturing and recycling. Social aspects in assembly and use are considered.*

*A metal working SME conducts an in-depth analysis of opportunities to increase energy and material efficiency in production, including ICT/AI-enabled optimisation of machinery use, production planning and energy consumption as well as valorisation of production waste heat and pilot's implementation measures.*

## 5. Eligible costs

Although the payment will be made as a lump sum, it is necessary to explain in the application form how the lump sum will be used, including a clear budget proposal with the following budget categories:

- Personnel costs: employees or equivalent, natural persons under direct contract, seconded persons, SME owners and natural person beneficiaries
- Subcontracting costs (based on beneficiary's usual purchasing practices and ensuring best value for money and no conflict of interests)
- Purchase costs: travel and subsistence

- Purchase costs: equipment, infrastructures and other assets (calculated on the basis of the costs actually incurred and written off in accordance with international accounting standards and the beneficiary's usual accounting practices)
- Purchase costs: other goods, works and services

The primary focus of the project funding should not be on purchase of equipment nor external contracting services. While there is no specific limit on subcontracting costs, in case of subcontracting activities, a collaborative execution of core project tasks and deliverables by the internal staff of the applicant and subcontractors is crucial.

Indirect costs are added by applying the 25% flat rate to the direct costs that qualify for indirect costs, these are all cost categories listed above except for subcontracting.

Only costs generated during the lifetime of the project are eligible.

## 6. How to evaluate applications

To perform an evaluation, you must carefully read the application and rate each of the following three criteria by using a scale from 0 to 5 points (half point scores may be given):

0 = The proposal fails to address the criteria, or it cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information.

1 = Poor – The criterion is inadequately addressed or there are serious inherent weaknesses.

2 = Fair – The proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses.

3 = Good – The proposal addresses the criterion well but there are a certain number of shortcomings.

4 = Very good – There is a small number of shortcomings but overall, the proposal addresses the criterion very well.

5 = Excellent – The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion with minor or no shortcomings

In your evaluation, it's important to differentiate between small scale and large scale projects, considering their focus and objectives, expected output and funding allocation. Small scale projects primarily focus on validating the technical, economic, and social aspects of circular business models. The main output is a comprehensive feasibility study, including a detailed business plan. Small scale projects receive funding up to €15,000. This amount is appropriate for conducting feasibility studies, market research, and initial testing of concepts. Large scale projects go beyond validation and concentrate on pilot and demonstration activities towards implementing transition measures identified and preliminarily validated in earlier stages. The output is a validated prototype. Large scale projects require more resources for pilot activities and demonstrations and receive funding up to €50,000. This higher budget allows for more extensive testing, implementation, and validation of circular solutions.

In principle, as the financial scope of a project proposal increases, the evaluation process should become more rigorous to ensure thorough risk management, assumption validation, and overall project viability, especially when assessing large scale projects.

Criteria	Weight	Score
<p><b>Concept: Does the project demonstrate a clear alignment with the objectives of the Up2Circ?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Relevance:</b> Are the objectives of the project clearly defined and achievable within the scope of the Up2Circ? Is the description of the problem sufficiently detailed and understandable? Does the project address the transition of the company towards a circular economy, considering the actions taken to date? Are the envisaged measures relevant and meaningful for the circular transition within the context of the company's business model?</li> <li>• <b>Novelty:</b> To what extent does the proposed project introduce new value to the company, regardless of its novelty at a European level? How does the project demonstrate the adoption of advanced technologies and/or social innovation to enable circularity within the company's operations?</li> </ul>	30%	Threshold 3/5
<p><b>Feasibility: Do you have all the necessary resources and capabilities to execute the project proposition?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Workplan:</b> Does the provided work plan outline a clear and achievable timeline with monthly activities, key milestones, and deliverables? Are the planned activities relevant for addressing the stated problem and achieving the project's objectives?</li> <li>• <b>Team and network:</b> How does the composition of the team and network demonstrate relevant expertise and resources to achieve the project objectives? Is collaborative execution of core project tasks and deliverables by the internal staff of the applicant and subcontractors ensured if subcontracting is involved? How does the applicant plan to address any expertise gaps within the current team?</li> <li>• <b>Only for large scale projects: Risk analysis:</b> Are the foreseen technical and business risks relevant, considering the scale of the project, and are the proposed mitigation actions appropriate?</li> </ul>	30%	Threshold 3/5
<p><b>Impact: Has the funding the potential to significantly contribute to enhancing the sustainability of your business?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Environmental and social impact:</b> Have the potential environmental and social impacts been quantified and justified by sound Key Performance Indicators KPI(s)<sup>2</sup> related to</li> </ul>	40%	Threshold 3/5

<sup>2</sup> Impact should be quantified by establishing baseline and target values for at least one recommended Key Performance Indicator (KPI) related to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 7, 12, and 13, which will contribute to making the company more circular. Methodology used to calculate these values should be described, as well as any additional expected environmental or social impacts along with qualitative indicators.

SDG 7 Affordable and Clean Energy: Improvements in energy efficiency can be measured with a ratio of energy consumption per economic output.

SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production: Decrease in waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse

SDG 13 Climate Action: Reduction of GHG emissions, e.g., striving for 55% reduction of GHG emissions by 2030 in line with the EU's "Fit for 55" and Green Deal targets

<p>sustainability? Are the calculations of the baseline and target value(s) of the KPI(s) clear and realistic?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Business and broader impact:</b> What is the expected economic impact<sup>3</sup> of the project for the applicant's company? To what extent is the project expected to influence the relevant industrial sector? What is the anticipated impact, of the project on the region where it will be implemented, and what is its potential for replication?</li> </ul>		
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The maximum overall score is 15. The standard threshold for individual criteria is 3, and the standard overall threshold, applying to the sum of the three individual scores, is 10. The average of the 3 scores and total will be calculated for each proposal. In order to rank applications with same scores, priority will be given to applications that achieve higher scores in the Impact criterion. Additionally, second priority will be assigned to projects with a higher ranking in terms of novelty, while third priority will be given to projects based on the time of submission of the proposal. Proposals failing to achieve the threshold score per individual criteria and the overall threshold will be rejected.

You are expected to comment on all three criteria: Concept, Feasibility, Impact , and on the whole proposal, highlighting: Strengths and Positive Aspects, Shortcomings, Recommendations.

Individual consensus group meetings involving three evaluators assigned to the same proposal will be initiated by Up2Circ consortium partners if a substantial difference in scoring is detected for the proposal. Substantial difference in this context refers to a minimum 5-point difference between the total score given by the lowest and highest evaluation.

For all proposals you will carry out an ethics screening to detect if the proposed projects include ethically sensitive activities, such as processing of personal data, the use of AI- based applications and interactions with human subjects. You can read further practicalities in the [How to complete your ethics self-assessment guide](#). In case ethically sensitive activities are detected, SMEs receiving Up2Circ third party funding will be obliged to take measures to ensure compliance with ethical principles, the applicable international and national law, and to include details about ethics compliance into their reporting.

Proposals will be ranked separately for small scale and large scale projects according to the overall scores in descending order. The ranking will be subject to an online Evaluation and Ethics Advisory Board meeting with assigned evaluators, the Ethics Advisor and Up2Circ project partner representatives who meet to discuss how to manage potential ethics issues and agree on the final list of selected applicants and a reserve list.

The evaluation results will be available by September 6<sup>th</sup>, 2024. All applicants will be informed about the evaluation results by email, including the Evaluation Summary Report.

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<sup>3</sup> Impact should be quantified by establishing baseline and target values for the recommended Key Performance Indicator (KPI) related to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8. SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth: Improvements in resource efficiency and in decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation. You can e.g., compare the decrease in consumption of primary materials with the number of jobs created and preserved or with increased turnover

## 7. Evaluator selection and deadlines

You will be contacted shortly before the submission deadline to see if you are available to evaluate applications. If you respond positively, we add you to the list of evaluators. After the submission deadline we will match the eligible applications to potential evaluators. For each project proposal you will receive an email confirming the work and inviting you to access the project documentation and accept or reject the application/s assigned to you. The deadline to accept or reject the assignments is communicated in the invitation email. If you accept your assignment(s), you will be asked to perform your evaluation within a set deadline. The assignment of evaluators is done on a rolling basis.

You must submit your evaluations within defined number of calendar days commencing from the date the application is assigned:

- For small scale projects (feasibility studies): within 10 days
- For large scale projects (piloting and demonstration): within 15 days

The deadline is communicated in your invitation email. Evaluations must be performed in English.

## 8. Conflict of interest

You must inform the Contractor immediately when recognizing potential conflict of interest in the assessment of assigned proposals, in particular if:

- You have been involved in the preparation of an application.
- You would benefit either directly or indirectly from the eventual selection of an application.
- You have a close family or personal relationship with any person representing the applicant.
- You are a director, trustee or partner or are in any way involved in the management of the applicant.
- You are employed or contracted by one of the applicant legal entities or any named subcontractors.
- You are an employee of any of the Up2Circ consortium partners.

Should a conflict of interest during the evaluation be discovered and confirmed by the Contractor, you will be withdrawn from the evaluation.

## 9. Confidentiality

Evaluators are required to treat information contained within applications with the strictest confidentiality and to declare any potential conflict of interest. Evaluators are responsible for ensuring and maintaining confidentiality of any data, documents or other material related to the evaluation process, during and after completion of the evaluation. In the case of a breach of those obligations, the Contractor reserves the right to suspend any payment or compensation, and in serious cases, to undertake legal action.