T.C. SANAYİ VE TEKNOLOJİ BAKANLIĞI

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TURKIYE NATIONAL CONTACT POINT FOR WIDERA
TÜBİTAK

HORIZON-WIDERA-2027-04-WIDENING-01 · EXCELLENCE HUBS

How to Create a Consortium to Develop a Regional Quadruple Helix Research and Innovation Ecosystem?

Consortium design under the Excellence Hubs call, a comparison across editions, and real funded-project examples

TÜBİTAK · TURKIYE National Contact Point for WIDERA
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TODAY'S AGENDA

What We'll Cover in 15 Minutes

1. What is the Excellence Hubs call, and what does the quadruple helix model mean?
2. The 2027 call's consortium and eligibility requirements, including official clarifications from REA
3. What's changed, and what hasn't, across the 2022, 2023 and 2027 calls
4. Four real funded projects from past editions: consortium structures and lessons
5. A practical roadmap for building your own consortium

INTRODUCTION

What Is Excellence Hubs?

Excellence Hubs is a Horizon Europe instrument supporting **regional innovation ecosystems** in Widening countries to build strong links between academia, business, public authorities and society, fostering a **place-based culture of innovation** through cross-border cooperation.

HORIZON-WIDERA-2027-04-WIDENING-01	€100.00 M	04 March 2027	Max. 5 Years
Call Code	Indicative Budget	Deadline	Project Duration

Projects are built around a shared R&I and investment strategy aligned with regional smart specialisation strategies (RIS3), complementing science-focused schemes such as Teaming, Twinning and ERA Chairs with an innovation component; synergies are sought with EIC Pathfinder, EIT Community Hubs and the JRC's Regional Innovation Partnerships.

How it differs from Teaming: Teaming is built around a single institution, whereas Excellence Hubs is a network of place-based innovation ecosystems built on the quadruple helix principle, covering a much broader set of regional actors.

The Quadruple Helix Model: Four Actors

Every Excellence Hub ecosystem must include all four of the actor categories below: a requirement that has stayed unchanged since 2022 during the whole Horizon Europe Programme.

1 Academia

Universities and/or non-university research centres/laboratories

2 Business

Established firms with ≥2 years' proven turnover (start-ups/consultants allowed if justified)

3 Public Authority

Public bodies / competent agencies operating at regional or local level

4 Societal Actors

Civil society organisations, associations, citizens, end-users, media, cultural actors

CONSORTIUM REQUIREMENT

At Least 2 Ecosystems, 2 Different Widening Countries

The core rule of the 2027 call: Proposals must include at least two "place-based R&I ecosystems" from at least two different Widening countries. Each ecosystem must be located entirely within a single Widening country and must cover all four actor categories.

- Only organisations established in a Widening country, as defined under the Horizon Europe Regulation, may apply as coordinator.
- Organisations from non-Widening countries may join if duly justified (e.g. specific expertise or a value-chain link) — REA has confirmed this can only ever be a minor component, not a parallel structure.

A POINT WORTH NOTING

- Going beyond the minimum is entirely the applicant's call: most funded projects meet the requirement with exactly two ecosystems, but a third or fourth is neither better nor worse — it simply has to be justified by what the project genuinely needs; see the project examples from 2022 and 2023 calls:

2022 Excellence Hubs Çağrısı: HORIZON-WIDERA-2022-ACCESS-04-01: EU Funding & Tenders Portal

2023 Excellence Hubs Çağrısı: HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ACCESS-07-01: EU Funding & Tenders Portal

Two Ways to Demonstrate an Ecosystem

There are two ways to show that a Widening country ecosystem covers all four actor categories:

A Via an Umbrella Organisation

- One or more umbrella organisations (e.g. a cluster) whose membership already spans all four actor categories take part as a single structure.
- REA recommends this route for smooth management: an existing umbrella organisation with its own legal personality limits the number of individual consortium members you otherwise have to manage directly.

B Via Individual Entities

- Separate legal entities, each representing one of the four actor categories, join the consortium directly as beneficiaries.
- On this path, at least one business representative in each ecosystem must be an established firm with at least 2 years of proven turnover at the time of application (shown via balance sheet/activity report).

Straight from REA: Consortium & Actors

Answers received directly from REA to questions submitted on the Excellence Hubs call

1. Can umbrella and individual entities be combined?

No - the Work Programme allows either an umbrella organisation whose membership spans all four actor categories, or individual legal entities each representing one category. It does not provide for combining the two, e.g. an umbrella covering two categories plus individual entities for the other two.

2. Representing a complex ecosystem

For complex ecosystems with a large number of members, where there's no umbrella organisation, it's recommended the ecosystem be represented by a limited number of core partners - at least one research and one established business partner - who sign the Grant Agreement. Other members are listed with a short role description but don't sign the GA and may not claim project costs; affiliated partners are also an option.

3. Formalising the quadruple helix

There is no obligation to have a dedicated legal entity assembling all four components. For smooth management, it's recommended to rely on an existing umbrella organisation with its own legal personality (e.g. a cluster) to limit the number of individual consortium members. A consortium agreement is mandatory - nothing more.

4. Defining a "business entity"

At least one business entity per ecosystem must prove it has existed for at least two years before the call's publication and generates significant operational income from commercial activity - not public funding. Balance sheets or extracts from annual business reports, annexed to the proposal, are accepted as evidence.

5. Choosing societal actors

The call text's examples are only a guide. The sole condition is that societal actors be neither commercial nor part of the public administration their added value, outreach and impact for the project's R&I context is what will actually be assessed.

Source:
Excellence Hubs
HORIZON-WIDERA-2027-04-WIDENING-01 /
Topic Q&As:
EU Funding & Tenders Portal

Straight from REA: Roles, Balance & Participation

The remaining official clarifications - on defining public authorities, company balance, European added value, and outside-country participation.

6. Defining "public authorities"

Representative public entities with a clear role in shaping policies and/or ensuring public support for the implementation of national or regional strategies.

7. SMEs versus large companies

The ecosystem concept implies an adequate mix of large and small companies, which may vary by domain and sector - no preference for either type is indicated in the call. SMEs are especially encouraged and the call is SME-friendly; start-ups are welcome too, but not exclusively.

8. What does "European relevance" mean?

Added value from joint European funding versus presumably isolated regional or national activities. The consortium must demonstrate it is more than the sum of its parts - the individual ecosystems - through the strategic benefits of the envisaged European collaboration as a whole.

9. How far can non-Widening participation go?

The Excellence Hubs action does not foresee "advanced partners" as in other Widening actions. Legal entities from non-Widening Member States and associated countries may still participate, beyond the two core ecosystems, if necessary to achieve the action's objectives - but only as a minor component.

Source: Excellence Hubs HORIZON-WIDERA-2027-04-WIDENING-01 / **Topic Q&As:** EU Funding & Tenders Portal

Are These Rules New? 2022 – 2023 – 2027

	2022 (ACCESS-04-01)	2023 (ACCESS-07-01)	2027 (WIDENING-01)
Indicative Budget	€50.00 M	€60.00 M	€100.00 M
Contribution per Project	€3.00 – 5.00 M	€2.00 – 6.00 M*	€1.50 – 4.50 M
Funded Projects	13 (10 + 3 reserve)	12	~30 (indicative)
Min. Ecosystem Requirement	2 ecosystems / 2 Widening countries	2 ecosystems / 2 Widening countries	2 ecosystems / 2 Widening countries
Quadruple Helix (4 Actors)	Yes	Yes (same 4 categories)	Yes (same 4 categories)
Demonstration Path	Umbrella org / at least 2 reps (1 research + 1 business)	Umbrella org / individual entities representing the 4 categories	Identical to 2023
Business Entity Requirement	≥2 yrs proven turnover (start-ups/consultants allowed if justified)	≥2 yrs proven turnover	≥2 yrs proven turnover
Third-Party Financial Support	Not specified	Yes – up to €60,000/party	Yes – up to €60,000/party (SMEs/start-ups)
Funding Rate	Standard CSA (100%)	Standard CSA (100%)	**70% (new! – remaining 30% must be explained)**
Page Limit	Not specified	Not specified	**40 pages (new)**

** In the 2023 call, the contribution ceiling can rise to €6.00 M with the optional mentoring module.*

The consortium architecture has stayed largely the same across 3 editions

The quadruple helix principle, the 2-ecosystem/2-country requirement, the umbrella-organisation-or-individual-entities demonstration mechanism, and the proven-turnover requirement for the business partner; none of this has changed from 2022 to 2027. What has changed is only budget size, the funding rate, and other technical details.

What this means in practice: Projects funded under the 2022 and 2023 calls are reliable, directly applicable models for your 2027 application. Studying their consortium structures can be a source of inspiration.

EXAMPLE 1 · 2022 CALL (ACCESS-04-01)

MetaCities

MetaCities Excellence Hub in South-Eastern Europe — Greece, Cyprus and Bulgaria, with non-Widening partners built in -

Greece + Cyprus + Bulgaria (3 ecosystems) Ecosystems	**University of Patras (Greece)** Coordinator	**~€5.00 M** Budget	**2023–2026 (4 years)** Duration	**21 organisations, 5 countries (GR 9 · CY 5 · BG 5 · DK 1 · NL 1)** Number of Partners

Academia

University of Patras (coordinator), University of Peloponnese, CYENS Centre of Excellence (Cyprus), Technical University of Sofia, Aarhus University (Denmark, non-Widening)

Business

Yodiwo, P-NET (Greece); EBOS Technologies, Primetel (Cyprus); Inovatsionni Sistemi (Bulgaria); Smartavatar B.V. (Netherlands, non-Widening)

Public Authority

Municipality of Patras, Region of Western Greece; Union of Cyprus Municipalities; Municipality of Burgas (Bulgaria)

Societal Actors

Cyprus Consumers' Association; Hellenic Institute for Road Safety; South-East Digital Innovation Hub (Bulgaria)

Worth noting: The one example in our set with non-Widening partners inside the core consortium: Aarhus University (Denmark; participation later ended) and Smartavatar B.V. (Netherlands) — a concrete illustration of REA's "minor component" rule, layered on top of three full Widening-country ecosystems.

MetaCities Excellence Hub in South-Eastern Europe | METACITIES | Project | Fact Sheet | HORIZON | CORDIS | European Commission

EXAMPLE 2 · 2022 CALL (ACCESS-04-01)

SolarHub

A Greek-Turkish Solar Energy Excellence Hub to Advance the European Green Deal

Türkiye + Greece (2 ecosystems)	**METU / GÜNAM (Türkiye)**	**~€4.85 M**	**2023–2026 (4 years)**	**20 organisations, 5 countries (TR 10 · GR 7 · DE 1 · BE 1 · IE 1)**
Ecosystems	Coordinator	Budget	Duration	Number of Partners

Academia

METU/GÜNAM (coordinator), Ege University, Istanbul Technical University (Türkiye); CERTH, CRES (Greece); DLR (Germany, non-Widening)

Business

Kalyon Solar, Solimpeks Enerji, TAT Gıda (Türkiye); Brite Hellas, Venus Growers (Greece); International Development Ireland (Ireland, non-Widening)

Public Authority

TÜBİTAK, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (Türkiye); Regional Development Fund of Central Macedonia (Greece)

Societal Actors

ISES Türkiye section (Türkiye); Solar Heat Europe (Belgium, non-Widening)

Worth noting: A compact two-ecosystem design that still brings in three non-Widening partners — Germany, Belgium and Ireland — spread across three different helix categories:

- DLR (Germany) → Academia
- International Development Ireland (Ireland) → Business
- Solar Heat Europe (Belgium) → Societal actors

each a minor component alongside the two core ecosystems.

A Greek-Turkish Solar Energy Excellence Hub to Advance the European Green Deal | SolarHub | Project | Fact Sheet | HORIZON | CORDIS | European Commission

EXAMPLE 3 · 2023 CALL (ACCESS-07-01)

GeneH

Excellence Hub for Advancing Innovation in Gene Therapy — a Portugal–Slovenia Excellence Hub

Portugal + Slovenia (2 ecosystems)	Universidade de Coimbra (Portugal)	~€4.89 M	2025–2028 (4 years)	13 organisations across 2 countries (PT 7 · SI 6)
Ecosystems	Coordinator	Budget	Duration	Number of Partners

Academia

Universidade de Coimbra (coordinator), Instituto Pedro Nunes, Biocant (Portugal); Kemijski inštitut — National Institute of Chemistry (Slovenia)

Business

Bluepharma (Portugal); Biosistemika, Jafral (Slovenia)

Public Authority

CCDRC — Regional Coordination and Development Commission of the Centre, Unidade Local de Saúde de Coimbra (Portugal); Regional Development Agency of the Ljubljana Urban Region (Slovenia)

Societal Actors

Associação Portuguesa de Ataxias Hereditárias (Portugal); national patients'-association network, Slovenian Innovation Hub (Slovenia)

Worth noting: A clean two-ecosystem design where each country's side independently covers all four helix actors on its own — not one ecosystem leaning on the other to fill a gap.

EXAMPLE 4 · 2023 CALL (ACCESS-07-01)

MarTe

Marine Technology Excellence Hub for Sustainable Blue Economy in the Baltics — Estonia–Latvia Excellence Hub

Estonia + Latvia (2 ecosystems) Ecosystems	**KIK — Estonian Environmental Investment Centre (Estonia)** Coordinator	**~€5.00 M** Budget	**2025–2028 (4 years)** Duration	**13 organisations across 2 countries (EE + LV)** Number of Partners

Academia

Tallinn University of Technology, University of Tartu (EE); Latvian Institute of Aquatic Ecology, Ventspils University of Applied Sciences (LV)

Business

Association of Estonian Marine Industries (EE); Freeport of Ventspils (LV)

Public Authority

KIK, Saare Development Centre (EE); Kurzeme Planning Region, Investment and Development Agency of Latvia (LV)

Societal Actors

Saarte Koostöökogu NGO (EE); WWF Latvia, 'Baltic Coasts' NGO (LV)

Worth noting: Another clean two-ecosystem design, with a textbook quadruple helix split laid out in parallel across both Baltic ecosystems.

MarTe: Marine technology excellence hub for sustainable blue economy in Baltics | MarTe | Project | Fact Sheet | HORIZON | CORDIS | European Commission

Practical Roadmap: How to Build a Consortium

1 Define your regional priority

Align your topic with your region's smart specialisation strategy (RIS3) and show its relevance with EU policy priorities (Green/Digital Transition and etc).

2 Build your core ecosystem

Identify key institutions in your own region representing all 4 actors (academia, business, public, society) and secure their commitment.

3 Find a second Widening country

Set up a peer ecosystem in a Widening country with a similar thematic priority and complementary strengths.

4 Choose your demonstration path

Umbrella organisation, or individual representative entities? Make sure the business partner meets the 2-year proven turnover requirement.

5 Justify any third-country participation

Add non-Widening participation only with a concrete expertise or value-chain justification - the main weight should stay with Widening countries.

6 Design your budget and work packages

Keeping the 70% funding rate and the 40-page limit in mind, design the R&D component as a separate, proportionate work package.

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THANK YOU

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