

6th REINFORCING Open Call on “Responsible Innovation” (Incubator Call)

Introduction

REINFORCING supports organizations and institutions in Europe to transition to a new paradigm where responsibility and openness drive research and innovation (R&I) processes. The green and digital transitions have become of paramount importance to address the societal challenges that European societies currently face. The twin transition will bring enormous benefits but also undesired externalities and implications. In this regard, EU institutions and territories need to shift to more open and transparent R&I practices in which all actors share responsibility to develop services and products that are acceptable, sustainable, and bring social satisfaction.

The Open and Responsible Research and Innovation (ORRI) approach promotes collaborative efforts, sharing research outputs as early as possible for engaging citizens in co-creation processes and opening R&I to the whole society. Implementing Open and Responsible Research and Innovation (ORRI) can seem a daunting task. Over the past decade, many resources and tools have been created, but an effort to systematize, curate, and create a single-entry point was still missing. REINFORCING is this much-needed European central hub for ORRI. The REINFORCING platform (<https://reinforcing.eu/oss-platform>) is the entry point to knowledge, training, ORRI skills matchmaking, and capacity building for organizations interested in starting or continuing their journey to creating an inclusive R&I ecosystem.

Furthermore, the project brokers unique networking opportunities for organizations, institutions, and territories interested in becoming part of the European ecosystem that is transforming the R&I system by bringing it closer to society and societal needs. To support this change, REINFORCING has ring-fenced funding to invite institutions from around Europe to develop projects aiming at implementing new modes of doing R&I that drive more just transitions. All the Calls have supported and will support territories and organizations experimenting with ORRI for the first time (ORRI Incubator Open Calls) as well as those scaling up their ORRI activities (ORRI Booster Open Calls).

Responsible Innovation Open Call description

Proposals applying for the REINFORCING 6th Open Call must revolve around **practices** of **Responsible Innovation**.

The European Union stands at a critical juncture in the evolution of its research and innovation (R&I) ecosystem. The proposed “Fifth Freedom,¹” encompassing the free circulation of research, innovation, data, education, and competences, responds to this challenge by placing the generation and diffusion of knowledge at the core of Europe.

Yet, realising the promise of the Fifth Freedom requires more than structural reforms and investment in infrastructure. It demands a sound approach to how research and innovation are conceived and conducted that ensures alignment with societal needs, democratic values, and ethical standards.

Responsible Innovation is both a well-rooted and a necessary framework to guide this transformation, grounding scientific and technological advancement in principles of transparency, inclusiveness, responsiveness, and anticipation. Moreover, Responsible Innovation supports the creation of a truly “European Knowledge Commons” where open science, ethical standards, and public participation converge. It reinforces Europe’s position not only as a regulator of technologies but as a proactive co-shaper, along with its citizens, of socially relevant R&I.

Thus, Responsible Innovation plays a crucial role, enabling research to navigate complex ethical landscapes and multidimensional challenges through cross-sectoral, interdisciplinary, and participatory approaches.

Activities to address Responsible Innovation

Projects applying for the REINFORCING 6th Open Call should consist of several activities, examples of which could be proposed are listed below.

Please note that the list is non-exhaustive and should serve as inspiration rather than a task list. Applicants can perform different complementary activities within the 12 months of the supported project, not necessarily just one particular activity.

Potential activities:

- Designing and/or implementing co-creation processes with citizens at large (or specific categories of citizens, e.g., patients) to develop

¹<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/ny3j24sm/much-more-than-a-market-report-by-enrico-letta.pdf>

- innovative products, processes, and services for grand societal challenges and missions² or in co-valorisation processes³
- Designing and/or implementing ORRI journeys (e.g., training and dialogue workshops) for innovators developing cutting-edge technological products and services⁴
- Implementing citizen engagement models (such as citizen juries or scenario workshops) to co-design strategic innovation plans and key innovation policies in collaboration with societal actors and citizens, at local, regional, or national level.⁵
- Designing and implementing responsible processes to manage innovations in research centers and universities (e.g., introducing and adopting Socially Responsible Licensing mechanisms and instruments)⁶
- Implementing the Societal Readiness approach⁷ to better align innovation trajectories with societally desired and needed goals and adapt to overcome undesired aspects of the proposed innovation

Furthermore, through the proposed actions, applicants must demonstrate how they intend to embed and institutionalize ORRI within their organisation or territory, in order to ensure long-term commitment to Responsible Innovation.

The [MLE on Public Engagement in R&I reports](#), the [Code of Practice on Citizen Engagement for Knowledge Valorisation](#), and the [Code of Practice on the management of intellectual assets](#) should be considered relevant sources of reference.

Call requirements and details

The REINFORCING Sixth Open Call, as an Incubator Call, has specific and mandatory requirements to comply with:

² For instance, the EU-funded project MOSAIC implemented this kind of activity in the context of the EU Mission "CITIES": <https://mosaic-mission.eu/>

³ For instance, the EU-funded project CO-VALUE is exploring this kind of activity: <https://www.co-value.eu/>

⁴ For instance, the EU-funded project ENLIGHT implemented this kind of activity: <https://enlightproject.eu/>

⁵ For instance, the EU-funded project TRANSFORM implemented this kind of activity: <https://www.transform-project.eu/lombardy/>

⁶ https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/research-area/industrial-research-and-innovation/eu-valorisation-policy/knowledge-valorisation-platform/thematic-focus/socially-responsible-licensing-tool-increase-societal-value-creation-ri_en

⁷ The Societal Readiness Thinking Tool was elaborated within the EU-funded project NewHoRRizon, and subsequently detailed in Bernstein, M. J., et al. (2022). The Societal Readiness Thinking Tool: A Practical Resource for Maturing the Societal Readiness of Research Projects. *Science and Engineering Ethics*, 28(1), 6. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11948-021-00360-3>

- The consortium must include at least 2 entities based in EU countries (Member State or associated country), including their outermost regions or associated countries eligible to receive Horizon Europe grants, provided that the applicants are not covered by the Council sanctions in force. The main applicant (in terms of budget and activities) - the project Coordinator - must have little or no experience in ORRI.
- Release an ORRI resource (or ORRI Tool) to be inserted into the REINFORCING online platform. The resource should be included in the proposal text as one of the results to be delivered and its development in the list of activities to be performed.
- Attend the online internal 6th REINFORCING Open Call Kick-off meeting and online monthly meetings with the 5th REINFORCING Open Call Coordinators and REINFORCING consortium representatives.
- Partake in the REINFORCING ORRI training workshop on-site in Brussels, led by REINFORCING partners.
- Take part in the online 6th Open Call mid-term review meeting.
- Join the online internal 6th REINFORCING Open Call Final Event.
- Participate in the public 6th REINFORCING Open Call Webinar at the end of the project.
- Contribute to the online communication and update of the REINFORCING project channels (e.g., website, social media, etc.) with grantees' achievements and information.
- Engage in peer learning activities.

While designing your proposal, please bear in mind that **REINFORCING does not fund:**

- Training or consulting activities for institutions, organizations, and territories that are not part of the consortium, since institutional changes are requested to be visible and measurable in the funded entities (grantees), at least in the Coordinator (main beneficiary) of the project.
- Activities related to technological developments and/or proof of concepts, while REINFORCING could support co-creation and/or visioning workshops linked to those activities - if coherent with the scope and the requirements of the Call.
- Marketing and consumer studies that do not foresee a meaningful engagement of citizens or other societal actors that goes beyond providing feedback on already existing innovations.
- Activities of any kind in which artificial intelligence-based systems or techniques are used or developed. Reflection on AI ethics and responsibility can instead be part of the funded actions - if coherent with the scope and the requirements of the Call.

- Projects mainly revolving around the design of a new Code of Practices on Citizen Engagement for Knowledge Valorisation in a specific innovation field.
- Projects just exploring Responsible Innovation, RRI, or ORRI theory.

Applications proposing such activities as listed above will be rejected in the initial phases of the evaluation process, as they will be considered ineligible.

For the 6th REINFORCING Open Call, no more than **8 consortia** implementing projects lasting 12 months will be supported with grants of **up to 60,000 euros each**. Please note that different durations of the projects (less or more than 1 year) are not possible and will not be considered eligible. Furthermore, please consider that all the funded projects will **start on 15th January 2026 and end on 14th January 2027**. No change in these dates can be negotiated.

Information on application procedures is available on the REINFORCING website, where the Guide for applicants, the Frequently Asked Questions, and the Checklist for Applicants can be downloaded:

<https://reinforcing.eu/open-calls/current-calls>.

The Call Coordinator of the REINFORCING 6th Open Call is Fondazione Giannino Bassetti.