

## **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)**

### **Start From Knowledge Program**

## **Background**

The Start From Knowledge Program is part of the Startup Competitiveness Incentive System and aims to stimulate the creation of startups in the academic environment and the transfer of scientific and technological knowledge from national Higher Education Institutions to the business sector.

Under the published Call, support applies to the territory of Mainland Portugal and to economic sectors in general, with the exception of sectors subject to the limitations of the de minimis aid regime.

## **Eligibility**

Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, including startups, may apply, provided they meet the requirements set out in the Regulation and the Call.

In addition to the general criteria, the Call requires that the company be majority-owned and controlled by one or more natural persons, and that at least one of those persons holds a minimum of 25% of the share capital at the time of application.

That same person must be enrolled, or have been enrolled in the two preceding calendar years, in a degree-conferring study program at a national Higher Education Institution, or have carried out research or teaching activities at one of those institutions.

The company must also have been active for less than three years at the date of application submission, must not have received more than €100,000 through venture capital instruments, and must not operate in sectors excluded under the de minimis regime.

## **Application**

Each beneficiary may only submit one application under this Call.

The application is submitted via an online form published by Startup Portugal and AI<sup>2</sup>, and must include the completed form, a pitch deck of up to 10 slides in PDF format, a video pitch of up to 2 minutes, and the documents listed in Annex A.

The beneficiary must also be registered on the Balcão dos Fundos (Funds Portal), as this registration is essential for the allocation of funding. The application period remains open until **30 September 2026**, or until the number of applications received reaches the limit determined by the available budget allocation, whichever occurs first.

### **Activities and Expenditure**

Applicants must, as a rule, select three eligible activities to be developed and identify the deliverable associated with each one.

If the application includes activities related to the development of proof-of-concept or pilot projects, or the development of the business plan and model, only two activities may be selected. Eligible activities include ignition, incubation and acceleration programs, study and business start-up activities, participation in events, marketing strategy, proof of concept, business plan, intellectual property, and regulatory mapping.

Expenditure must be relevant to the selected activities, contracted at market conditions, and demonstrable through adequate documentation. Non-eligible expenditure includes, among others, current operating costs, VAT, real estate, vehicles, interest, working capital, routine advertising, and expenditure already funded by another public support scheme.

### **Assessment and Decision**

Applications are analysed based on the eligibility criteria and selection criteria defined in the Call, and compliance with the DNSH (Do No Significant Harm)

principle meaning no significant harm to environmental objectives is also required.

The two central selection criteria are the project's impact on strengthening the applicant's growth potential and the project's impact on its technological innovation. For approval, the application must obtain a qualitative assessment of "Compliant" across all criteria.

When the available budget is insufficient to fund all eligible and approvable applications, ranking is determined by the date of submission, with earlier submissions taking precedence.

## **Execution and Obligations**

The support takes the form of a non-repayable grant, in a fixed amount of **€30,000 per approved application**, paid as a 100% advance after submission of the acceptance term.

Projects have a maximum duration of 12 months from the date of signing the acceptance term. After project completion, the beneficiary must submit a final report and deliverables within a maximum of 60 working days, request legal recognition as a startup within the same period, and retain all supporting documentation of project execution.

Partial non-compliance with the contracted activities may result in a proportional reduction of funding, in accordance with the table set out in the Call.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **1. What is Start From Knowledge?**

It is a program to incentivise the creation and development of innovative startups linked to the academic environment, with a focus on the valorisation and transfer of scientific and technological knowledge.

## **2. Who can benefit from the support?**

Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, including startups, that meet the requirements of the Regulation and the specific conditions of the Call.

## **3. Does the company need to have a link to higher education?**

Yes. At least one natural person holding 25% or more of the share capital at the time of application must have a recent connection to a national Higher Education Institution, as a student, lecturer, or researcher.

## **4. Is there an age limit for the company?**

Yes. The company must have been active for less than three years at the date of application submission.

### **4.1. Does the company need to have organised accounting?**

Yes. The company must have organised accounting in place.

## **5. Is there a limit on prior venture capital investment?**

Yes. The company must not have received more than €100,000 through venture capital instruments.

## **6. How many applications can each company submit?**

Each beneficiary may only submit one application under this Call.

## **7. What is the value of the support?**

The grant amounts to €30,000 per approved application.

## **8. Is the support repayable?**

The support is awarded as a non-repayable grant, provided the contracted result indicators are met.

## **9. How is the payment made?**

Payment is made as a 100% advance of the grant, following submission of the acceptance term.

## **10. Is the support subject to the de minimis rule?**

Yes. Funding is awarded under the de minimis aid regime, with a maximum cumulative limit of €300,000 over three years per single undertaking.

### **10.1. What is de minimis aid and how does it work?**

These are small-scale public subsidies subject to a cumulative limit of €300,000 per single undertaking over three years. The de minimis limit calculation considers the single undertaking as defined in the regulation, including any associated or linked companies.

### **11. What activities can be included in the application?**

Activities may include ignition, incubation and acceleration, business preparation, networking events, marketing, proof of concept, business model, intellectual property, and certifications or regulatory requirements.

### **12. How many activities should be selected?**

As a rule, three. Exceptionally, only two may be selected when one of them corresponds to proof of concept/pilot projects or the development of the business plan and model.

### **13. Is it mandatory to identify deliverables?**

Yes. Each selected activity must have an identified deliverable, which must be demonstrated in the final report.

### **14. What expenditure is eligible?**

Expenditure relevant to the approved activities, incurred at market conditions, duly evidenced, and where applicable associated with intangible assets acquired from unrelated third parties.

### **15. From what date can expenditure be considered eligible?**

As a rule, from the date of application submission. For expenditure related to the study, preparation, and start-up of business activity, costs incurred from the beginning of the calendar year prior to the submission deadline set out in the Call may be eligible.

### **16. What are examples of non-eligible expenditure?**

Non-eligible expenditure includes VAT, current operating costs, real estate, vehicles, interest, working capital, routine advertising, and expenditure funded by another public support scheme.

### **16.1. What is considered current operating expenditure?**

The Call identifies normal operating costs of the beneficiary as non-eligible expenditure, but does not provide a closed and exhaustive list. In practical terms, these should be understood as recurring and routine costs required for the normal operation of the company, without a concrete, specific, and demonstrable link to the eligible activities contracted under the project.

### **17. What documents must accompany the application?**

The documents listed in Annex A must be submitted, including: permanent company certificate, RCBE (Central Register of Beneficial Ownership), proof of link to higher education, SME certification, tax and social security clearance certificates, declaration of autonomous or single undertaking, balance sheet from the previous year's closed accounts (IES n-1) or incorporation balance sheet, pitch deck of up to 10 slides in PDF format, and a video pitch of up to 2 minutes presenting the importance of the grant for improving the technology and business maturity level.

### **18. Is registration on the Balcão dos Fundos required?**

Yes. Registration on the Balcão dos Fundos is indicated as an essential element for the allocation of funding.

### **19. What is the deadline for submitting applications?**

Applications may be submitted until **30 September 2026**, unless the call closes early due to exhaustion of the limit set by the available budget allocation.

### **20. How are applications assessed?**

Applications are assessed by Startup Portugal, acting as the technical support team, with the final decision resting with the FITEC Executive Committee.

### **21. What are the selection criteria?**

The criteria are the project's impact on the applicant's growth and the project's impact on the applicant's technological innovation. The Call provides further detail on what should be addressed under each criterion.

**22. What is required for approval?**

It is necessary to obtain a qualitative assessment of "Compliant" across all selection criteria and to meet all eligibility criteria.

**23. What happens if there are more eligible applications than available funding?**

In that situation, applications are ranked by submission date, with those submitted earliest taking precedence.

**24. How long does it take to communicate the decision?**

The Call provides for a decision within 30 working days after the submission deadline, which may be extended in certain situations. Notification of the final decision must occur within 5 working days after the decision.

**25. Is there a hearing process for applicants?**

Yes. Before the final decision, applicants may submit comments on the draft decision within a maximum of 10 working days following notification.

**26. Can the decision be challenged?**

Yes. A complaint may be submitted to the FITEC Executive Committee within 15 working days of notification of the decision via the platform.

**27. How is acceptance of the support formalised?**

Acceptance is formalised through electronic submission of the acceptance term with a qualified electronic signature or legally admissible authentication, along with tax and social security clearance certificates.

**28. What happens if the acceptance term is not submitted within the deadline?**

The approval decision lapses if the term is not submitted within 30 working days of notification, unless a justified and accepted reason is provided.

**29. How long can the project last?**

The project can last up to 12 months from the signing of the acceptance term.

**30. What obligations exist at the end of the project?**

The beneficiary must submit the final report and deliverables, apply for legal

recognition as a startup, and retain all supporting documentation of project execution.

**31. Can funding be reduced?**

Yes. Non-compliance with the contracted activities may result in a proportional reduction of funding, in accordance with the table set out in the Call.

**32. Where can clarifications be requested?**

Clarifications can be requested via the email address indicated in the Call and through information published on the Startup Portugal and AI<sup>2</sup> websites.

**33. Will beneficiaries report expenditure or the activities carried out?**

The primary focus of reporting is on the activities carried out and their respective contracted deliverables, which must be demonstrated in the final report. Nevertheless, beneficiaries must retain adequate documentation, including proof of expenditure and other elements attesting to project execution, as the eligibility of expenditure and its link to the activities may be verified during monitoring.

**34. Until when can eligibility and other requirements be verified?**

Responsibilities, eligibility conditions, and other requirements may be verified at any time, in the context of application analysis, project execution, and monitoring and control activities. Without prejudice to this, the Call also identifies specific moments at which certain requirements must be met, namely by the time of signing the acceptance term or by project closure, depending on the criterion in question.