

## ESA Phi-Lab Netherlands Open Call for Proposals

### Invitation to Apply to ESA Phi-Lab Netherlands

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Thank you for your interest in ESA Phi-Lab Netherlands.

Space-based studies and technology developments bring benefits to Earth in the form of services and top-class science. This makes the space industrial sector of high strategic and economic value. At the same time leading edge research brings benefit to space, and indeed to Earth and society with disruptive innovation.

As part of Phi-LabNET, one of the Components of the Innovate Element in the ScaleUp Programme, ESA is rolling out a dynamic network of Phi-Labs in ESA Member States.

Phi-Labs do bridge the gap between early-stage research and markets. They ensure that the research is not just innovative but closely serve immediate ESA or industry needs. Phi-Labs are geared for supporting the maturation of technologies that enable commercial applications. The focus is given to applications with the potential to disrupt and transform markets. The support provided is intended to boost the delivery of innovation, thereby reducing the time to market.

In The Netherlands, NL Space Campus is responsible for managing ESA Phi-Lab Netherlands. ESA Phi-Lab Netherlands offers a comprehensive package of support to research teams selected, including access to and use of ESA Phi-Lab Netherlands infrastructure, equipment, workspace, innovation seed funding, technical support, business coaching, and legal/IPR advice. The ESA Phi-Lab Netherlands also facilitates access to the infrastructure and resources offered by its technical and academic partner including access to facilities and expert support. The focus of ESA Phi-Lab Netherlands is Earth Observation, critical PNT-infrastructure, and Secure Satellite Communication as well as the common capabilities supporting the aforementioned.

ESA Phi-Lab Netherlands hereby invites you to submit your application to enter the ESA Phi-Lab Netherlands programme. All research activity proposals shall be in view of and shaped for potential commercial applications.

This document introduces the application and evaluation process and contains references to the templates that should be used when applying.

Please contact ESA Phi-Lab Netherlands for any further questions.

Yours sincerely,  
Parya Pasha Zadeh  
Manager ESA Phi-Lab Netherlands

## Introduction

The purpose of this Open Call for ESA Phi-Lab Netherlands is to inform about the opportunity for research projects to become supported by ESA Phi-Lab Netherlands and to provide the material and guidance needed to apply for support.

Selection and evaluation of applications are scheduled periodically, for details see <https://www.esaphilab.nl/>.

The Call is permanently open, has no closing date for the submission of applications, but the evaluation and selection will take place twice per year. The evaluation dates are indicated and detailed on the website.

## Research Focus at ESA Phi-Lab Netherlands

The main goal of the ESA Phi-Lab Netherlands is to stimulate and promote disruptive innovation in the Netherlands.

In the absence of a mature private commercial space market in Europe, economic operators need to align their innovation efforts for products and services with the demand and funding opportunities the national governments as public customer offer. This means that to maximise impact, the thematic areas of focus for the ESA Phi-Lab Netherlands need to align with the long-term space policy of the Dutch government. Earth Observation, critical PNT-infrastructure and Secure Satellite Communication play a key role in the present focus areas of the Dutch space policy and are also highlighted in the recently published long term space agenda that will form the basis of the Dutch space policy for the years to come. By focussing on these thematic areas, the ESA Phi-Lab Netherlands makes sure that the supported innovation projects fall into economically fertile ground with maximum potential to have real impact.

In particular, recent advancements and upcoming developments in EO and PNT provide immense opportunities for commercialisation of research and developments in the New Space context. In addition to the three pillars mentioned above, we will also consider projects focusing on Common Capabilities supporting these pillars of innovation.

Thematic positioning of the ESA Phi-Lab Netherlands is a combination of upstream and downstream elements. The ESA Phi-Lab Netherlands will not be monothematic but will target a multifunctional approach as this integral approach and interaction between upstream and downstream would enforce innovation on different levels.

Proposals must clearly describe the research objectives, methodology, and how the project will advance the state of the art.

## Who can apply?

The research project proposal must be submitted by (a team part of) a legal entity or a consortium of legal entities.

The proposed research shall enable market disruptive application, of potential high socio-economic impact; it shall be based on solid research-driven evidence of its feasibility. There shall be evidence of market traction for the applications that the technology (to be matured by the research project) enables.

The idea shall have a valid space connection. This is:

- The exploitation of space technology, use of knowledge from the space domain, or use of space systems and space-based services in non-space domains (spin-off),
- Or the provision of products or services for the space sector, addressing any part of

the space value chain (from components to entirely new space systems or related facilities and services) and any related activity (from concept definition to operation), possibly using non-space technology (spin-in).

Some further criteria apply:

- the project shall be relevant for the specific focus of competence of the ESA Phi-Lab Netherlands and the specific topics as defined in the previous section.
- the project shall demonstrate a clear link to the NL Space ecosystem and detail the added value for the Economic Operator as well as the NL Phi-Lab, the NL Space Campus and NL space sector.
- the project shall be focused on maturing (a) technology(ies) towards the performance levels required by the target application(s).
- the applicants must fulfil all the requirements below:
  - To be part of a legal entity established in an ESA Member State, Associate Member of European Cooperating State (specify Country), and can demonstrate that the research activity can deliver a benefit to the Phi-Lab, which is of particular importance for applicants that are part of a legal entity established in a State different from the one of the Phi-Lab.
  - To observe the remaining requirements stated in this document.
  - When acting in collaboration with other national or foreign entities, the applicant will be the sole contractor and will be fully responsible for managing the funding.
  - To declare that the work proposed under the submitted ESA Phi-Lab project in Netherlands is not being funded through other means (e.g. ESA R&D activities, ESA Business Incubation, ESA Business Applications, European Commission etc).

## How to apply

Please make sure you have received the following documents, which are part of the Open Call documentation:

- Cover Letter including Requirement Checklists.
- ESA Phi-Lab Netherlands Research Proposal:
  - Executive Summary.
  - R&D and Potential Impact Proposal.
  - Activity and Management Proposal.
- Draft Research Contract including Draft Service Agreement and Draft Workspace Agreement [and Draft Workspace Agreement, if applicable].

Make sure to fill in all required sections in the application templates and pay particular attention to the following:

- Instructions inside the documents (**highlighted in blue in each template**) shall be followed in order to fulfil all pre-conditions of the Open Call and for the application to be accepted.
- Please read the Draft Contract carefully. The Cover Letter must include a clear, explicit, and unambiguous statement declaring that the applicant has read, understood, and accepted the terms and conditions contained in the contractual documentation (this is part of the Cover Letter template). Modifications or amendments to the Contract may only be done in exceptional cases. Please contact the local Phi-Lab Netherlands Manager for guidance.

- Make sure the Cover Letter and the Requirement Checklists are signed by the legal representative of the Legal Entity.
- Support in ESA Phi-Lab Netherlands may be requested for a maximum of 24 months.

## Submission

Please submit the application documents in electronic form (pdf, maximum three files, one for each required document) to the following e-mail address\*:

[info@esaphilab.nl](mailto:info@esaphilab.nl) with the subject line “Application NL Phi-Lab Open Call.”

Any questions related to submission of proposals should be sent to the same e-mail address: [info@esaphilab.nl](mailto:info@esaphilab.nl).

*\*Alternatively, you may use the online submission form under the <https://www.esaphilab.nl/>*

## Budget and additional benefits

The available budget for the implementation of the call in selection rounds of 2025 is 400.000 EUR and the available Innovation Seed Funds per winning project is 200.000 Euro.

This amount shall represent a percentage ranging from 50% to 100% of the total allowable cost of the activity, subject to compliance with the following provisions:

- Work conducted by SMEs may be funded up to a maximum level of up to 80% of the total allowable cost of the activity.
- Work carried out by universities and research institutions involved as subcontractors in a consortium and justifying no further commercial interest in the product or service may be funded to a maximum level of 100% if this funding does not exceed 30% of the total allowable cost of the activity; Should work need to be (sub)contracted for more than 30% of the total eligible costs, such additional share shall be co-funded up to a maximum of 50% of the total eligible costs; Universities and research institutions claiming to have any commercial interest in the future exploitation of the final product or service shall be required to demonstrate this interest. In such a case, the funding level for SME or non-SME shall apply.
- Work conducted by economic operators that are not SMEs nor universities and research institutions may be funded up to a maximum level of 50% of the total allowable cost of the activity.

In addition to the budget made available for the research activity, the ESA Phi-Lab Netherlands will contribute with the following elements:

- Research mentoring and technical advisory.
- Business and IP coaching / advisory
- Access to technical facilities at favourable conditioned as detailed on the ESA Phi-Lab Netherlands website (<https://www.esaphilab.nl/>).
- Access to background IP as detailed on the ESA Phi-Lab Netherlands website (<https://www.esaphilab.nl/>)

Additional cooperation in the R&D may be negotiated between the bidder (applicant) and the ESA Phi-Lab.

## Eligible costs

To be eligible, all project costs must be:

- Necessary to the execution of the project.
- Incurred by the beneficiary and recorded in its accounts.
- Incurred during the contract term.
- Indicated in the cost planning in the proposal.
- Without VAT, interest owned, or duties.

Expenses incurred in the preparation and dispatch of the proposal will not be reimbursed.

The project may consider the following direct costs:

- Staff costs.
- Subcontracting costs.
- Access to data sources or intellectual property.
- Materials, equipment, and facilities.
- Travelling, subsistence, and accommodation costs.

The following costs incurred are eligible:

- Train and plane costs in Economy Class, up to 700 Euro travelling in Europe and up to 1600 Euro travelling outside Europe.
- Local transport, accommodation, and daily subsistence costs (Taxi costs, Car rental and/or car mileage, Accommodation up to 250 Euro per person per night; Subsistence costs up to 100 Euro per person per day).

Information regarding all Travelling, Subsistence and Accommodation costs must be provided in the Mid-Term (where applicable) and Final Reports and shall include the objectives of the occasion (event, meeting, etc.), contacts made and results.

- Business development and promotion (data sheets, flyers, trade shows etc.). Attendance to trade shows (or similar) should be agreed in advance with the ESA Phi-Lab Netherlands Manager.
- Other – costs not included in the above categories but deemed critical to the execution of the project should be agreed in advance with the ESA Phi-Lab Netherlands Manager.

## The evaluation procedure

The evaluation of all received applications is managed locally by ESA Phi-Lab Netherlands and follows common ESA Phi-Lab procedures.

Once an evaluation moment deadline has passed, ESA Phi-Lab Netherlands first assesses the formal aspects of applications received before the submission deadline for the evaluation moment. If a formal non-compliance of formal nature is found, the applicant may be asked to address this in an updated proposal within 48 hours. If the proposal is found non-admissible, the applicant will be informed, and the reason will be explained. In such a case an applicant is eligible to submit a revised proposal later for the next evaluation rounds.

If the application is compliant with the formal requirements, applicants will be invited to hold a presentation to the ESA Phi-Lab Netherlands evaluation board. The evaluation will typically take place a few weeks after the submission deadline. The evaluation board consists of representatives of ESA Phi-Lab Netherlands, ESA, Netherlands Space Office

(NSO), Key partner(s) and other experts. There will also be an opportunity for the evaluation board to ask questions to the applicant.

The application and the presentation will be marked against the criteria detailed in Table 1, taking weighting factors into account.

Criteria	Sub criteria
<b>Background and Experience</b> (25%)	a) Experience Team composition b) Partnerships and Support Entities c) Vision
<b>Research and Technology developments.</b> (30%)	a) Relevance for the Call b) Suitability of technology for targeted application c) Understanding of and leveraging on the State of the Art (SoA), novelty of the proposed research d) Maturity and feasibility for target application and feasibility e) Relevance of the proposed R&D approach
<b>Commercial Opportunities and Potential Socio-Economic Impact</b> (25%)	a) Potential Market Segment b) Potential Product/ Service c) Potential Customers/Users d) Value Proposition e) Potential Socio-Economic Impact (including sustainability) f) IPR strategy
<b>Activity and Management proposal</b> (20%)	a) Relevance of the work to achieve objectives b) Milestones/Cost-planning c) Work break-down structure d) Management of the research project

Table 1: ESA Phi-Lab evaluation criteria and weighting factors.

All applicants will be notified in writing about the outcome of the evaluation. The applicant may require, within 10 calendar days from the receipt of the notification, an oral debriefing explaining the reason the application was successful or not.

ESA Phi-Lab Netherlands will enter contract negotiations with successful applicants, taking the comments of the evaluation board into account. ESA Phi-Lab Netherlands has the right not to place a contract if, after three months after the notification to a successful applicant, no contract still is not signed, and this is because of a reason for which the applicant can be held accountable.

Furthermore, we kindly ask you to pay attention to the following:

- Please note that applications will be treated as confidential. However, the applicant's idea may through this application fall into the public domain (e.g. if local laws require so). Therefore, we strongly recommend that the applicant discusses the protection of his/her idea with a dedicated expert in this field prior to application, and – if relevant – takes appropriate steps to protect the idea (e.g. by applying for a patent).
- As far as allowed by law, any title held by the applicant to his/her idea shall remain vested in him/her. An application to ESA Phi-Lab Netherlands will not result in the acquisition of any title whatsoever to the idea. However, ESA retains the right to use

the Intellectual Property in specific cases. Please read the detailed conditions described under the section “Use of Intellectual Property Rights” in the Draft Contract.

- No expenses incurred in either stage of the application procedure will be reimbursed to the applicant by ESA Phi-Lab Netherlands, ESA and/or any third party.
- This Open Call does not impose any obligation upon ESA Phi-Lab Netherlands to enter into negotiations with any applicant.
- Economic operators interested in submitting a proposal to Phi-Lab Netherlands, not yet registered as potential Tenderers with ESA, are requested to complete the online questionnaire on the “esa-star registration” website (<https://esastar-emr.sso.esa.int/>).

Any entity, including any subcontractor in the Proposed Team at the time when a tender is submitted, is required to have already completed the “Full Registration” as described in the following esa-star Registration User Manual:

<https://esastar-emr.sso.esa.int/Account/DownloadFile>

The registration as an ESA Entity includes the obligation to subsequently fill in the Agency Questionnaire and to update it yearly at the following link:

<https://esastar-em.sso.esa.int>.

Failure to provide or update the required information will result in the access to the non-public part of esa-star being blocked.

Further information on the registration process can be found on the Industry Portal pages available at:

[http://www.esa.int/About\\_Us/Business\\_with\\_ESA/How\\_to\\_do/esa-star\\_Registration\\_Process](http://www.esa.int/About_Us/Business_with_ESA/How_to_do/esa-star_Registration_Process)