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Subject Fixed Call for Proposals for Co-Sponsored Research Activities (PhD Theses) under the Plan for European Cooperating States (PECS) in Malta

Ref.: ESA CfP/5-50158/NL/MH/yd
Activity No 1000044564 in the esa-star system

Budget Line: E/0908-15 – PECS Malta

Category: Fixed Call for Proposals

Dear Sir/Madam,

The European Space Agency (the “Agency” or “ESA”) and Xjenza Malta of the Republic of Malta hereby invite you to submit a proposal for the above subject.

This Call for Proposals (“CfP”) has been established and will be processed following the Call for Proposals procedure [see: <https://esastar-publication.sso.esa.int/supportingDocumentation/details/37>]

Your tender is required to conform to the conditions specified in this Cover Letter and in the applicable Appendices.

Your tender shall be submitted **exclusively in electronic format via esa-star Tendering** [see: <https://esastar.sso.esa.int/>]. The CfP Tendering Conditions (“CfP/TC”), attached hereto as Appendix 2, contain further information on esa-star and its operation.

This CfP was published on esa-star Publication (<https://esastar-publication.sso.esa.int>) on **24 November 2025** and is issued in English only.

1) Please find attached hereto the following documents:

Appendix 1 – Draft Co-Sponsored Agreement
Appendix 2 – Call for Proposals Tendering Conditions (CfP/TC)
Appendix 3 – Full Proposal Template (including proposal Cover Letter and Full Proposal Template)

2) Your attention is drawn to the following:

The present Call for Proposals is addressed only to legal entities of Malta registered in ESA-STAR as prime tenderer.

While the Call for Proposals is made visible to all ESA Member States, Associate Members and European Cooperating States, the present Call for Proposals is addressed only to legal entities of Malta registered in ESA-STAR, as prime tenderer.

Potential Tenderers are therefore requested to note that the Agency can only consider proposals from legal entities residing in Malta, which operate in accordance with the laws of Malta.

In this document, the term ‘national’ shall refer to Maltese.

The total maximum budget for this CfP is: **225,000 Euro (two hundred and twenty-five thousand Euro).**

- 3) The subject of this CfP is exclusively for the following activity type and the related mandatory requirements:

G2 - PhD Theses that correspond to a clear need from the Maltese Space Industry and would lead to a new product or service being able to be developed.

- i) Tenderers are invited to submit PhD research ideas up to the following maximum price: the proposals must be submitted in a co-funded basis. The price for ESA must **not be higher than Euro 75,000**. The industrial partner must co-fund a minimum of Euro 10,000.
- ii) TRL Requirement: **NOT APPLICABLE**.
- iii) Prime Contractorship: must be led by Academia. Industry must be involved as a partner in the definition of the research topic.
- iv) Expected Duration of the activity: maximum of 48 months.
- v) Note: A maximum of three activities will be funded.

- 4) General programmatic objectives and constraints:

- PhD Theses proposals submitted under this CfP must correspond to a clear need from the Maltese Space Industry and should potentially lead to a new product or service being able to be developed.
- The PhD is to be co-funded by the Maltese Plan for European Cooperating States (PECS) and a Maltese industrial partner. As such, your idea must fit the **programmatic objectives** of the Scheme as described below:
 - potential benefit to Maltese industry with regard to their current and future space products and services;
 - potential to secure long-term academic-industrial relations;
 - potential benefit to the Student for future employment in the space sector;
 - potential benefit to academia for continued research on space related topics;
 - credibility of the resulting work benefitting a Maltese industry's potential involvement in an ESA Programme;
 - in particular, the idea must come from a Maltese industry's need to conduct further research on potential future products and services before committing to their development or the need of Maltese industry to understand the physics, chemistry or behaviours of their existing space products and services in extreme conditions/durations more deeply, etc.
- The **research team** should be composed of:

- University or Research Institute that will act as Legal Entity and Prime Contractor and provide the PhD supervisor;
- industrial company that will co-fund the research, define the problem and act as the potential end-user of the Proposal with the prospect of a viable product, application or service that fits their business plan;
- a PhD student who will conduct the research up to the delivery of a PhD Thesis in direct coordination with the PhD supervisor, their research group and industry.

5) Procedure for the submission, evaluation and selection of proposals

- Please note that proposals are to be submitted by the closing date indicated below. The proposals will be opened and evaluated shortly after the mentioned closing date.
- Please note that a pre-requisite for submitting a Full Proposal is to have completed the on-line dedicated questionnaire for being registered with the Agency as an entity wishing to do business with the Agency. Further information on the subject is provided in this Cover Letter.
- The Member States of the Agency have made it mandatory for the Agency to register economic operators wishing to do business with the Agency. Economic operators not yet registered as potential Tenderers 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 at least have already completed the “Light Registration” as described in the following esa-star Registration User Manual:

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

Please note that only the “Full Registration” allows the Co-Sponsored Research Agreement to be placed with the selected Tenderer.

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.

- Special attention is drawn to the Policy on the Prevention, Detection and Investigation of Fraud ESA/ADMIN/IPOL-LEGI(2021)1. The aim of the Policy is to give a structured framework to the current practice by the Agency of investigating potential cases of Fraud through investigation teams set up on an ad hoc basis. It is required that you read the Policy and that you inform your personnel about the Policy. It is mandatory that you cooperate with the investigation teams, if so required. This obligation shall be flown down by you and fulfilled by your subcontractor(s) too.

The Policy on the Prevention, Detection and Investigation of Fraud is available at: <https://esastar-publication.sso.esa.int/supportingDocumentation>

- The following steps are used to evaluate and select proposals:
 - a) Opening of the Tenders. Proposals not complying with the Key Acceptance Factors defined below will be rejected and excluded from evaluation.
 - b) Evaluation of your proposal by the Agency's Tender Evaluation Board (TEB) according to the Evaluation Criteria and associated Weighting Factors (WFs) defined above.
 - c) Submission of a TEB Report Summary to Xjenza Malta of the Republic of Malta with:
 - i) results of the technical and scientific review of the proposals per activity type.
 - ii) corresponding ranking and recommendations per activity type.
 - d) Only proposals with an overall marking equal to or above good (60) will be recommended to the Xjenza Malta of the Republic of Malta for review and approval.
 - e) Xjenza Malta of the Republic of Malta performs the programmatic review and is responsible for the approval or rejection of the proposals taking into account primarily the recommendations of the TEB.

All proposals approved by Xjenza Malta of the Republic of Malta shall be approved by the Industrial Policy Committee (IPC) and PECS Committee prior to the Agency entering into negotiations.

- f) For approved proposals, the Agency will start the negotiation process to place a Co-Sponsored Agreement with the Tenderer on the basis of the submitted Proposal and the comments from the TEB and Xjenza Malta of the Republic of Malta.

The contact person of the Prime Contractor mentioned in the proposal (see section 6 of the Cover Letter of the Full Proposal Template) will be informed in writing of the result of the CfP after a decision has been taken. If the proposal has been unsuccessful, the Tenderer may request the nominated the Agency's Contracts Officer to advise them of the reasons why the proposal has not been retained in a verbal debriefing. Any information will be limited to the Tenderer's own proposal.

- 6) The contents of your Full Proposal will be limited to filling in as necessary the Proposal Template, provided in MS Word format and attached hereto as Appendix 3. Please note that the captions in red colour are meant to guide you in correctly filling in the template and that such captions are to be removed from your tender once it is ready for submission.
 - Please complete the part of the template labelled "**Cover Letter**" by filling in the blank spaces and deleting any options which are not applicable or not relevant (all such options are identified in red colour).
 - As part of the tender submission process in esa-star Tendering, you will be required to make declarations in relation with "**Declaration of Compliances**" (contained in Appendix 3 to this CfP – Full Proposal Template – Cover Letter) and "**Key Acceptance Factors**".

The CfP/TC indicate the consequences in case it would appear during the evaluation that the declarations contain incorrect statements.

When submitting your tender in esa-star Tendering, in the section “Key Acceptance Factors”, you will be prompted to declare that your tender fulfils each of the following Key Acceptance Factors:

1	The Tenderer confirms, on its behalf and on behalf of its Subcontractor(s), to satisfy the “Eligibility Requirements” (see section 1.1 of the CfP/TC)
2	The Tenderer confirms, on its behalf and on behalf of its Subcontractor(s), to fulfil the requirements concerning “Free Competition” (see paragraph 15 of the Cover Letter of the Proposal Template)
3	The Tenderer confirms, on its behalf and on behalf of its Subcontractor(s), to accept the conditions established for “Non commitment by the Agency in competitive procurements” (see Section 1.7 of the CfP/TC).
4	The Tenderer confirms, on its behalf and on behalf of its Subcontractor(s), to be compliant with the “Non Benefits Requirements” (see section 1.8 of the CfP/TC);
5	The Tenderer confirms that the tender Cover Letter and the Full Proposal contain a binding price;
6	The Tenderer confirms that the tender Cover Letter and the Full Proposal contain a price type compliant with the one requested in the CfP;
7	The Tenderer confirms that the tender is compliant with the budgetary limit applicable to the CfP;
8	The Tenderer confirms that its legal entity is registered in Malta;
9	The Tenderer confirms that it accepts the non-negotiable contract conditions.

- Please complete the part of the template labelled “**Full Proposal**” in all its parts by filling in the information relevant to the various chapters, sections and sub-sections (using exactly the same headings, same subject matters, same order and same numbering);
- Your Full Proposal is expected to elaborate upon the Agency’s requirements whilst remaining precise and concise. Therefore, mere repetitions of the Agency’s requirements are to be avoided;
- Your tender and all correspondence relating to it shall be in English.
- Please ensure that your tender complies with the following essential requirements:
 - a) As concerns the acceptance of your tender by ESA, please note that full compliance with the contract conditions, as contained in the draft Contract, is expected in order for your tender to be considered for Contract award.

- b) Your tender is valid during a period of fourteen (14) months from the time limit for tender submission.
- c) The total number of pages for the proposal **shall not exceed 25**. These 25 pages exclude the Cover Letter, the PSS forms and Annexes (if any). Annexes, if included, shall not be taken into account for the marking but are only used to assess the veracity of the statements in the 25-page limit.
- d) In “esa-star”, the submission shall contain two separate documents:
 - Document 1: The signed Cover Letter;
 - Document 2: One single file collating the signed Cover Letter, the proposal, the signed PSS forms and Annexes, if any, **in a searchable PDF format**.
- e) You and your subcontractor(s) completed at least the “Light Registration” in esa-star Registration.
- f) The “consortium structure” in esa-star mirrors the Proposed Team in your tender.

- 7) As concerns the evaluation of your tender by ESA, please note that the quality of your tender will be evaluated on the basis of the following evaluation criteria and associated Weighting Factors (“WFs”) (that are also mirrored in esa-star Tendering):

No.	Criteria	Weighting Factors %
1	Technical: Clarity of the objectives and of the Proposal. Research methodology. Novelty of the Proposal, stating what is new compared to published concepts, techniques or processes. The proposed work needs to address a not yet described or tested, but potentially feasible Proposal. Clear and potentially significant benefit with regard to the current state of the art. Background and experience of the PhD Student and entities related to the particular field concerned, including adequacy of the proposed facilities.	50%
2	Programmatic: Potential benefit to the Maltese industry with regard to their current and future space products and services. Potential to secure long-term academic/ industrial relations. Potential benefit to the Student for future employment in the space sector. Potential benefit to academia for continued research on space-related topics. Credibility of the resulting work benefiting a Maltese industry’s potential involvement in an ESA Programme.	50%

Please also note that, in making its recommendation for selection of a Contractor on the basis of the tender evaluation and/or in making a final decision for Contract award, the Agency shall also take into consideration the price quoted (amount).

- 8) In accordance with the Agency’s rules, issuing this CfP does not bind ESA in any way to place a Contract. Should it deem it appropriate, ESA also reserves the right to place a Contract for only a part of the activity covered by this CfP. Such decision by the Agency may not give rise to any claims by Tenderers having submitted a tender in response to this CfP.
- 9) Please note that economic operators are required to notify their interest to tender to the Agency. This is to be done via the esa-star Publication Expression of Interest function.

Any questions to the Agency relating to this CfP (clarifications shall be made exclusively via the dedicated function in esa-star Tendering), at the latest 14 (fourteen) calendar days before the closing date stated below.

The Agency will publish an anonymous copy of the question on esa-star Publication together with the Agency’s answer, and the question and answer shall also be available in the dedicated section of esa-star Tendering. Tenderers are asked to note that each response which the Agency makes goes through an internal review process, and that the response will be published once this internal review process has been completed.

If required, the Agency may request clarifications from any Tenderer; such Agency's requests shall be made exclusively via the dedicated function in esa-star Tendering.

The corresponding clarification from a Tenderer shall be provided exclusively via the dedicated function in esa-star Tendering and must be received within three (3) calendar days of the submission of the request, if no other period is stated. Clarifications shall not be regarded as amendments or modifications of the tender

- 10) Please note the provisions of the Submission Conditions that are contained in the CfP/TC.

In order to ensure the correct and timely submission of your tender, you are strongly invited to test the esa-star system and try out its functionalities and behaviour well in advance during the tendering period (please refer to Annex II of the CfP/TC).

The tender is successfully submitted when the status of the proposal in esa-star Tendering reads "submitted", i.e. when each section in the dashboard (Declaration of Compliance, Key Acceptance Factors and Consortium Structure) reads "completed" and all required proposal documents read "uploaded" and you click on "submit proposal to ESA".

Your tender and all supporting documents must be loaded and submitted in the esa-star Tendering not later than the **23 January 2026 at 13:00 hours (Amsterdam time zone)**.

- 11) The submitted Letter of Acceptance shall be signed by the authorised representative(s) of the Tenderer.
- 12) Should your tender be accepted by ESA, after evaluation, for placing a Contract, it is envisaged to have the negotiation meeting shortly after notification to you of the Agency's intention. Assuming a successful outcome, the Contract will first be signed electronically by the Agency and then sent to you for countersignature within the shortest possible delay.

This Cover Letter has been electronically signed

Yours faithfully,

Marnix Houten,
Head of Support Activities Contract Service,
Contracts Department