OPEN CALL ANALYSIS

PHOTONQBOOST OPEN CALL OC2-2026

Lump-sum grants of up to EUR 50,000 for SMEs that deploy or develop photonics and quantum technologies (Horizon Europe cascade funding)

EUnita strategic translation

PhotonQBoost, a Horizon Europe project, passes EU money to SMEs as lump sums for using or building photonics or quantum hardware: up to EUR 50,000 for a Pilot (an SME deploys an existing technology with a named technology provider); up to EUR 40,000 for a Solution (a provider develops or validates its own hardware at TRL 4 to 8); up to EUR 10,000 for external training or services; and EUR 560 or EUR 900 to join a matching mission. Projects last up to six months from a planned 1 April 2027 start. Payments follow an indicative schedule that the Sub-Grant Agreement will address: Month 3 is subject to satisfactory progress and KPI achievement; the Month 6 balance reflects the fulfilment of the agreed KPIs and milestones. No budget breakdown is asked. Two independent evaluators score Impact, Excellence and Implementation; the previous round drew 152 applications for 15 Solutions grants.

PHOTONQBOOST ANALYSIS

Fit assessment | Sources | What it funds | Boundaries | Budget & competition | Eligibility | Money | Evaluation | Risks

Deadline: 19 January 2027, 17:00 CET (18:00 in Romania)

Call budget: EUR 1,438,300 | Pilots up to EUR 50,000 | Solutions up to EUR 40,000 | Trainings and Services up to EUR 10,000 | Missions EUR 560 or EUR 900 | Up to 96 SMEs | Opened 17 November 2026

Prepared by

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Analysis date: 20 November 2026

*This analysis interprets the official call documentation for applicants. It is not legal advice. The official texts are the Guidelines for Applicants OC2-2026 (file 'FINAL-1', 51 pages, with Annex 01), the call page with its FAQ section on photonqboost.eu and the call entry on the EU Funding & Tenders Portal (competitive call 17261); where this analysis and an official text differ, the official text prevails. Labels used: **Confirmed** (stated in an official source), **EUnita interpretation** (a reading or recommendation by EUnita), **Derived estimate** (arithmetic by EUnita on official figures).*

1. Decision summary: is this call for you?

PhotonQBoost Open Call OC2-2026 is a Horizon Europe cascade-funding call for SMEs that develop or use photonics or quantum technologies. It has 4 strands (Pilots, Solutions, Trainings and Services, and Matching Missions) and 5 online forms: one each for Solutions, Pilots and Trainings and Services, and one per mission. The money is a lump sum paid against agreed results. Only SMEs receive grants, from any EU Member State (Romania included) or 23 listed associated countries. The call closes on Tuesday 19 January 2027 at 17:00 CET (18:00 in Romania).

Item	Confirmed position	Source
Run by	The PhotonQBoost consortium (Horizon Europe project 101177922; coordinator 3URA Unipessoal Lda, Porto); funding body HaDEA	Guidelines pp. 1, 34; CORDIS
Budget	EUR 1,438,300 for up to 96 SMEs in 4 strands; cap of EUR 50,000 per SME across all PhotonQBoost open calls	Guidelines pp. 7, 17 (Table 6)
Grants	Pilots up to EUR 50,000 (up to 14); Solutions up to EUR 40,000 (up to 15); Trainings and Services up to EUR 10,000 (up to 15); Missions EUR 560 or EUR 900 (up to 52 SMEs)	Guidelines pp. 7, 15, 17
Who may apply	One SME, or two in a joint application (Solutions, Pilots); EU SME definition; established on or before 19 July 2026; registered in an EU Member State (Romania included) or one of 23 listed associated countries	Guidelines pp. 10-13, 18
Payment and length	Lump sum against KPIs and milestones; Solutions and Pilots run up to 6 months from a planned start on 1 April 2027 and are paid in 3 instalments under an indicative schedule (EUR 5,000; up to EUR 20,000, subject to satisfactory progress and KPI achievement; then the balance, reflecting the fulfilment of the agreed KPIs and milestones); the Sub-Grant Agreement will address the schedule	Guidelines pp. 11-13, 18, 34
Evaluation	Two independent evaluators; Impact 30%, Excellence 30%, Implementation 40%; at least 3 in each criterion and 10 in total	Guidelines pp. 25-30
Dates	Deadline 19 January 2027, 17:00 CET (the Portal's key facts differ: section 2); results planned for the last week of February 2027	Guidelines pp. 1, 17, 21; Portal

Good fit

- ✓ SMEs deploying an existing photonics or quantum technology with a named provider (Pilots)
- ✓ Hardware developers with a prototype at TRL 4 to 8 (Solutions)
- ✓ SMEs from any sector that integrate these technologies; being a photonics company is not required
- ✓ SMEs needing external training or services up to EUR 10,000 beyond the free catalogue
- ✓ SMEs in an EU Member State (Romania included) or 23 listed associated countries

Not a fit

- ✗ Large companies, universities, research organisations and public bodies
- ✗ Companies established after 19 July 2026, or registered outside the eligible countries
- ✗ Mainly software Solutions; Pilots without a hardware component or a named technology provider
- ✗ PhotonQBoost partners, affiliates, staff and subcontractors
- ✗ Proposals already funded in part or in full by another EU grant

EUnita verdict (interpretation)

A good fit for an SME with a concrete hardware case: a named device, provider and site for a Pilot, or a prototype between TRL 4 and 8 for a Solution. The form has no budget breakdown, but competition is real (152 applications for 15 Solutions grants last time) and the grant arrives in instalments tied to KPIs. What decides fit: the hardware condition, the technology provider (Pilots), the six-month window and the cash profile. Open points are in section 13.

2. Source verification and document status

Page numbers in this analysis are the printed page numbers of the Guidelines FINAL-1 (PDF page = printed page + 1).

Document	Version and date	Used for
Guidelines for Applicants OC2-2026, 'FINAL-1' (Annex 01 = all forms)	51 pages; file dated 18 November 2026; linked from the call page	Call text; followed here
Guidelines OC2-2026, 'FINAL'	52 pages; file dated 17 November 2026; still online	Earlier upload
Call page with FAQ section; EU Funding & Tenders Portal, call 17261	Read 18 November 2026 (call page again on 20 November: text unchanged)	Dates, FAQ answers, budget
Online application forms (5)	Snapshot of 18 November 2026	Closing time in Romania
CORDIS page 101177922; Work Programme Part 7; OC2-2025 results page and Guidelines	Read 18 and 19 November 2026	Consortium; legal basis; previous round

Where the official documents differ

- Deadline time: the Guidelines (pp. 1, 17, 21), the call page and the Portal's own description say 19 January 2027, 17:00 CET. The Portal's key facts show 'Deadline date 19 January 2027 16:00 (Brussels time)'; Brussels time in January is CET (derived), so the two differ by an hour. No document says which prevails. This analysis uses 17:00 CET (18:00 in Romania, as the online forms print it). Submit well before 16:00 Brussels time, which is 17:00 in Romania.
- Guidelines versions: 'FINAL' and 'FINAL-1' are both online and no official text says that one replaces the other; FINAL-1 is the later file. FINAL-1 names priority B 'Agrifood and Environment' in the introduction to the priorities and in the forms (FINAL says 'Agrifood' there); requires a GO from both evaluators in the alignment check (FINAL: a GO on every applicable question); ties the final payment to the final report and replaces 'contingent on the fulfilment of the agreed KPIs and milestones' with 'reflecting the fulfilment'; rewrites the divergence and consensus rules; no longer says that applications are ranked within each grant type; and re-orders the legal-validation list and adds a phone number for bank validation. Amounts, dates and eligibility criteria are unchanged.
- Info Days: the Guidelines list 2 (24 November and 17 December 2026); the call page and news post show the first.
- Payment timing: the call page says Solutions are paid 'within 30 days after milestone approval' and cites Guidelines p. 11; FINAL-1 has no such sentence.
- Trainings and Services: Table 6 gives up to 15 grants of up to EUR 10,000 (15 x EUR 10,000 = EUR 150,000, derived) and a line total of EUR 100,000.
- Conflict of interest and other EU funding: 'may be rejected' on the call page; eligibility criteria with automatic rejection in the Guidelines (pp. 19, 24); a confirmed conflict 'may' lead to disqualification (p. 20).

3. What the call funds

Confirmed: PhotonQBoost is a Horizon Europe Coordination and Support Action (topic HORIZON-CL4-2024-RESILIENCE-01-41, 'Innovate to transform' support for SME's sustainability transition). The Work Programme lets the project pass on grants of at most EUR 50,000 to each third party, for example for feasibility studies, prototyping, pilot testing, demonstrating, specialised consultancy and access to testing facilities (Work Programme Part 7, pp. 172-174). OC2-2026 is part of the second open call under the grant agreement; a third and final open call is foreseen later (Guidelines p. 6).

The 4 strands

Strand	Grant	What is funded and who applies	Duration and payment
Solutions	Up to EUR 40,000; up to 15 grants	Technology providers that develop or validate photonics and/or quantum solutions for industrial challenges. Hardware development, integration, modification or validation is required; TRL 4 to 8. One SME or two in one joint application	Up to 6 months, planned start 1 April 2027; 3 instalments tied to KPIs and milestones (indicative schedule)
Pilots	Up to EUR 50,000; up to 14 grants	Technology adopters (end users) that deploy existing photonics and/or quantum technology in a real operational setting, with the hardware component described and the technology provider named. One SME or two	Up to 6 months, planned start 1 April 2027; 3 instalments (indicative schedule)
Trainings and Services	Up to EUR 10,000; up to 15 grants	External trainings or services only: for example business process adaptation, feasibility studies, software development, consultancy or coaching, standards and certifications, sustainability audits, professional training. Two quotations	A maximum execution period applies (length not published); paid after completion on invoice and evidence of delivery
Missions	EUR 560 (Vilnius) or EUR 900 (Lannion); up to 52 SMEs	A contribution to the cost of attending ecosystem visits, thematic discovery sessions, ideation workshops and matchmaking; up to 2 team members per SME	Vilnius 2027-S1 (semiconductors, space and defence); Lannion 2027-S2 (life sciences and environment); paid after each mission

Thematic priorities (Solutions and Pilots)

Every Solutions or Pilots proposal must address at least one of 5 priorities and name it (Guidelines pp. 8-10):

- A. Advanced Manufacturing: precision laser systems, additive manufacturing, material processing; optical sensing, imaging and metrology for process monitoring and quality control.
- B. Agrifood and Environment: photonic or quantum sensing for precision agriculture; hyperspectral imaging and laser sorting for food processing; rugged optical sensors for the field.
- C. Life Sciences and Health: lab-on-chip, OCT, advanced spectroscopy and imaging; continuous and remote health monitoring; point-of-care diagnostics.
- D. Mobility: sensing for autonomous driving; energy-saving illumination; automotive manufacturing and fault detection; battery technology.
- E. Digital Technologies: sensing for fault detection on semiconductor or photonic devices; resilient communication networks (quantum links, QKD components, post-quantum cryptography); photonic computing hardware.

Support beyond the grant

Solutions beneficiaries receive tailored technical and advisory support from the partners; Pilots beneficiaries also get access to testing facilities and pilot validation services; Trainings and Services beneficiaries get free advisory services and Key Account Manager support. All beneficiaries gain access to mentoring, coaching and networking opportunities under the project's Advisory Support Services Framework (Guidelines pp. 10-15; call page). Pilots may use technologies available on the market or through technology partners (p. 12). A Mission is encouraged for Solutions and Pilots beneficiaries but is not a condition of those grants.

4. Boundaries: avoid the wrong door

Not funded	Confirmed position	Source
Software-led Solutions	Projects consisting exclusively or predominantly of software development are 'not the target'; software is allowed only alongside the hardware work. Pilots must identify and describe a hardware component	Guidelines pp. 11-12
Innovation by assembly alone	Integration of off-the-shelf components alone is not sufficient evidence of innovation (Solutions). Pilots may use technologies already on the market	Guidelines pp. 11-12
Projects over 6 months	A declared duration above 6 months makes a Solutions or Pilots application ineligible	Guidelines pp. 39-40
Equipment, travel and own staff under Trainings and Services	Only subcontracted external services; travel, equipment, consumables and similar expenses are not eligible, nor the applicant's own personnel costs; nothing already free in the PhotonQBoost catalogue	Guidelines p. 14; call page FAQ
Mission grants for host-country SMEs	An SME legally established in the host country of a mission gets no grant for that mission but may attend without funding	Guidelines pp. 16, 19
Non-SMEs	Only SMEs receive grants. Other companies, universities and RTOs may ask to join a mission without funding	Guidelines pp. 16, 18
Double funding; consortium members	A proposal already partly or fully funded by another EU grant is ineligible; partners, affiliates, staff and subcontractors cannot apply	Guidelines pp. 19-20

Neighbouring doors

The documents name no other call. Inside this call, EUnita interpretation: software development, certification or consultancy that a Solutions or Pilots application cannot carry may fit Trainings and Services (up to EUR 10,000, external providers); an SME that only wants to meet partners may apply for a Mission. Services the PhotonQBoost catalogue offers free are not funded here and can be used directly. A third and final open call is foreseen; its date, budget and rules are not published (Guidelines p. 6).

5. Budget, competition and expected number of grants

Strand	Number of SMEs	Value per SME	Line total	Waiting list
Solutions	Up to 15	Up to EUR 40,000	EUR 600,000	3
Pilots	Up to 14	Up to EUR 50,000	EUR 700,000	3

Strand	Number of SMEs	Value per SME	Line total	Waiting list
Trainings and Services	Up to 15	Up to EUR 10,000	EUR 100,000 (15 x EUR 10,000 would be EUR 150,000)	3
Missions	Up to 52 (Lithuania up to 25, France up to 27)	EUR 560 (LT) or EUR 900 (FR)	EUR 38,300	20 (10 + 10)
Total	Up to 96		EUR 1,438,300	

Confirmed: Guidelines p. 17 (Table 6) and p. 31 (waiting lists); the call page counts 96 SMEs. The awarded amount may be lower than the limit and is aligned with the scope of the application (p. 17). Derived estimate: 600,000 + 700,000 + 100,000 + 38,300 = 1,438,300; 15 + 14 + 15 + 52 = 96; 25 x 560 + 27 x 900 = 14,000 + 24,300 = 38,300.

Confirmed, previous round (OC2-2025): its results page, which publishes the statistics as images, shows 296 applications from 174 unique applicants in 32 countries: 152 for Solutions, 76 for Missions and 68 for Trainings and Services. The Solutions image carries the note '13.8 selection thereshold' (sic) without saying on what scale. The project site has 15 funded-solution pages. OC2-2025 had no Pilots.

Derived estimate: 15 funded Solutions out of 152 applications is about 10% (15 / 152 = 9.9%). For Trainings and Services, up to 15 grants against 68 applications is about 22% (15 / 68), and for Missions up to 40 places against 76 applications is about 53% (40 / 76), if every place was used; the number of awards in these 2 strands is not published. Not published: application numbers for OC2-2026 and any figure for Pilots, which are new in 2026.

6. What has been funded before

Confirmed (results page of OC2-2025; the project's funded-solution pages): the previous round opened on 17 November 2025 and closed on 19 January 2026 at 17:00 CET. The project site has a funded-solution page for each of 15 Solutions, linked from the results page; grant amounts are not stated. Three examples: Artemis Analytical, a compact laser-based hybrid mass-spectrometry prototype for soil monitoring; CNC Solutions (Lasermett), an inline laser-based measurement system for parts made by CNC turning; RayVen Laser, 2 micrometre ultrafast laser processing of polymer micro-structures for microfluidic and lab-on-chip devices. No beneficiaries are listed for Trainings and Services or Missions.

Confirmed (Guidelines OC2-2025): the budget of the previous round is EUR 728,800 in the summary and EUR 728,000 in the budget table.

Confirmed: Open Call #1 was a Matching Mission to Poland (Warsaw, 2025): EUR 610 per SME, up to 20 SMEs, EUR 12,200 in total (Guidelines of that call).

What changed from OC2-2025 to OC2-2026 (Guidelines of both calls)

- Pilots are new; Solutions keep the EUR 40,000 ceiling.
- Solutions weights moved from Impact 25%, Excellence 35%, Implementation 40% to 30%, 30%, 40%, with named sub-criteria.
- Two SMEs now submit one joint application with a single ceiling; in 2025 each submitted its own.
- Duration: 2025 expected 6 months with minor justified adjustments; 2026 makes a declared duration above 6 months ineligible. The optional slide deck is 5 slides (15 in 2025).

7. Who should apply, and with which ideas

The call targets SMEs that operate in photonics or quantum, or integrate these technologies into their business (Guidelines p. 1); the call page FAQ confirms that being a photonics or quantum company is not required. The ideas below follow the call's own priorities (EUnita interpretation).

Applicant	Strand	Ideas the priorities point to
Manufacturing SME adopting a technology	Pilot	Laser processing, optical metrology, inline inspection or defect detection on a real production line (A); photonic or quantum-enhanced processes in automotive parts, laser metallurgy, battery monitoring (D)
Food processor, farm or agri-service SME	Pilot or Solution	Hyperspectral or multispectral imaging, thermal or UV inspection, laser sorting and marking; rugged optical sensing in the field; photonic or quantum sensing for precision farming (B)
Clinic, laboratory or medtech SME	Pilot or Solution	OCT, advanced spectroscopy, phase or photoacoustic imaging; remote monitoring with photonic sensors; point-of-care diagnostics (C)
Photonics or quantum hardware SME	Solution	A prototype at TRL 4 to 8 whose novelty is clear against off-the-shelf parts; sensing for fault detection on semiconductor or photonic devices; photonic computing hardware; quantum links, QKD components or post-quantum cryptography with hardware as an output (E)
Two SMEs with complementary roles	Joint Solution or Pilot	One application, roles and shared objectives defined, one ceiling (EUR 40,000 or EUR 50,000)
SME with a capability gap	Trainings and Services	Standards or certification, a feasibility study, a sustainability audit, specialised consultancy, coaching or professional training from an external provider
SME seeking partners or markets	Missions	Vilnius (semiconductors, space and defence) or Lannion (life sciences and environment)

What the form rewards

EUnita interpretation: the forms ask for the device, the provider and the site; the TRL at start and end, justified; quantified economic and environmental impact; a work plan, KPIs and milestones; the planned use of the grant; and the team. Concrete answers match the sub-criteria in section 10. Software-only ideas and off-the-shelf assembly do not fit Solutions, and a Pilot of a technology far from deployable scores lower under Excellence (E4).

8. Eligibility checklist

Every eligibility criterion must be met; an application that fails any one is rejected automatically (Guidelines pp. 18, 24). In the list below, a tick marks a condition the documents set, a cross marks a bar, a question mark marks a point the documents leave open.

✓	The applicant exists as a legal entity and meets the EU SME definition (Recommendation 2003/361/EC). After selection an SME declaration, accounts and the latest cap table are requested (pp. 18, 33-34).
✓	Established on or before 19 July 2026, at least 6 months before the deadline (p. 18).
✓	Registered in an EU Member State (outermost regions included) or in Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Egypt, Faroe Islands, Georgia, Iceland, Israel, Japan, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, New Zealand, North Macedonia, Norway, Republic of Korea, Serbia, Switzerland, Tunisia, Türkiye, Ukraine or the United Kingdom. Romania is listed (p. 18).
✓	Every form field answered and every document supplied, all in English; a missing answer or document disqualifies the application (pp. 18, 21).

✓	Solutions and Pilots: a project duration within 6 months (p. 19; forms, pp. 39-40). Joint applications: at most 2 SMEs, one application, roles and shared objectives defined (pp. 11-13).
✓	Solutions: hardware development, integration, modification or validation; TRL 4 to 8 at start and at end, each justified; novelty beyond off-the-shelf integration (pp. 10-11, 39-40).
✓	Pilots: a described hardware component; a named technology provider (name, website, description, fit); deployment in a real operational setting; the provider's letter of commitment; confirmation that the provider was not funded through a PhotonQBoost Solutions grant (pp. 12-13, 40-42).
✓	Trainings and Services: external services only; nothing available free in the catalogue; 2 quotations valid until at least 30 April 2027 or a substantiated justification; contracting and payment only after the Sub-Grant Agreement (p. 14).
✓	Missions: not legally established in the host country; up to 2 attendees named with role, or up to 3 candidates (pp. 15-16, 19, 42-44).
✓	The request does not exceed EUR 50,000 per SME across all PhotonQBoost calls; the form asks about earlier PhotonQBoost funding (pp. 19, 37).
✓	Declaration of Honour: not bankrupt or in similar proceedings, no breach of social security or tax obligations, no administrative sanction or listed exclusion situation, and, in item 4b, 'stable and sufficient sources of funding to maintain the activity throughout the action and to provide any counterpart funding necessary' (pp. 46-47).
✗	A proposal already partly or fully funded by another EU grant (p. 19).
✗	A PhotonQBoost partner, affiliate, staff member or subcontractor, or an SME with a conflict of interest with a consortium partner (pp. 19-20).
?	Consequence of a conflict of interest or other EU funding: see the three readings in section 2. The helpdesk 'will not evaluate proposals or provide advice on the eligibility of applicants' (p. 22).

Consortium partners, for the conflict check (from CORDIS and the project's partners page): 3URA Unipessoal Lda (the coordinator in CORDIS; the partners page names EurA Innovation Ecosystems in Porto), EurA AG, Photonics Austria, JOANNEUM RESEARCH, Photonics BW, Czech Optical Cluster, Photonics Finland, TOOLAS, Lukasiewicz-ITECH, Photonics Bretagne, PPTF, Sonnenberg Harrison Partnerschaft mbB (listed by CORDIS, EU contribution EUR 0), Robert Harrison Consulting and the partner that runs the call's online platform; Fundacja Polistratos is listed as a partner without a grant. Where these lists differ, check both the CORDIS participant list and the partners page; the Guidelines name no prevailing list.

9. How the money works

Form of the grant

- Confirmed: a lump sum, not a percentage of costs. Funding is released gradually against agreed outcomes and milestones, 'rather than administrative justifications of time and/or expenses', and remains EU property until the final payment (Guidelines p. 18).
- No funding rate or co-financing percentage is stated for Solutions and Pilots. In the Declaration of Honour, item 4b (p. 46), the applicant certifies that its organisation has 'stable and sufficient sources of funding to maintain the activity throughout the action and to provide any counterpart funding necessary'. For Trainings and Services the SME pays any cost above EUR 10,000 (p. 14).
- The forms ask for the main activities, resources or equipment the grant will support and, if hardware is involved, which equipment or components will be acquired or used; no detailed budget breakdown is required (pp. 39-41). No eligible or ineligible cost types are listed for Solutions and Pilots. Subcontracting is allowed but must not represent the majority of the total funding requested (call page FAQ, which names no strand).

Indicative payment schedule (Guidelines pp. 11-13; the Sub-Grant Agreement will address the schedule, p. 34)

Strand	Payments	Source
Solutions	Month 1: EUR 5,000 after the KPI and milestone plan is approved. Month 3: up to EUR 20,000 after a successful mid-term assessment, subject to satisfactory progress and KPI achievement. Month 6: the balance, up to EUR 15,000, after the final evaluation and final report, reflecting the fulfilment of the agreed KPIs and milestones. Each payment also needs the feedback form	Guidelines pp. 11-12
Pilots	The same schedule and conditions; balance at Month 6 up to EUR 25,000	Guidelines pp. 12-13
Trainings and Services	After the approved training or service is completed, on invoice, evidence of delivery and the feedback form; services are contracted and paid only once the Sub-Grant Agreement is in place	Guidelines p. 14
Missions	Lump sum after each mission, after participation is checked and the feedback form is submitted	Guidelines p. 16

Derived estimate: at full amounts a Pilot receives 10%, 40% and 50% of EUR 50,000 at Months 1, 3 and 6 under the indicative schedule, and a Solution 12.5%, 50% and 37.5% of EUR 40,000. Any cost paid before Month 3 above EUR 5,000 is carried by the SME until the Month 3 payment arrives.

Confirmed: the call page says Solutions are paid within 30 days after milestone approval; the Guidelines give no payment delay for Pilots and no rule for partly met KPIs (the OC2-2025 Guidelines said partial payments may apply).

Obligations after award (Guidelines pp. 34-36)

- A Sub-Grant Agreement with the consortium, represented by the project coordinator ('EurA PT' in the Guidelines, p. 34; CORDIS lists 3URA Unipessoal Lda as coordinator), covers the payment schedule, conditions, milestones and intellectual property; KPIs and the work plan are fixed at onboarding. Conflicts of interest must be reported at once; non-compliance may lead to termination or reimbursement of funds.
- Beneficiaries supply communication material (logo, description, images, progress updates) and show the EU emblem and the funding statement on promotional material.
- The EU and PhotonQBoost may publish the SME's name, country, project purpose, funding received and outcomes (an exemption can be requested if disclosure could harm commercial or academic interests); amounts go to an open access repository. Audits can take place at any time; supporting documents and deliverables are kept for up to 5 years after project completion.
- De minimis does not apply; the framework is Horizon Europe (call page FAQ).

10. Evaluation

Procedure

1. Eligibility check by two independent evaluators working separately, then cross-checked (p. 24).
2. Alignment check: thematic and technical alignment and technology domain (Solutions, Pilots); photonics or quantum connection (Trainings and Services, Missions); TRL (Solutions); technology provider (Pilots); service duplication and quotations (Trainings and Services). A GO from both evaluators is needed; a NO-GO from either means 'Not aligned', with a written explanation (pp. 24-25).
3. Evaluation and ranking by two independent evaluators with photonics and/or quantum expertise, after mandatory training; a Quality Evaluation Manager from the consortium partner that runs the

online platform 'supports and ensures compliance throughout the process' (p. 25).

4. Legal validation of pre-selected SMEs, then an invitation to sign the Sub-Grant Agreement (pp. 24, 33-34). The Portal lists the deadline model as single-stage; Figure 1 (p. 24) shows no interview step.

Criteria and weights

Each sub-criterion is scored from 0 to 5; a criterion is the average of its sub-criteria. Impact 30%, Excellence 30% and Implementation 40% apply to all 4 strands (pp. 25-29).

Criterion	Solutions sub-criteria	Where Pilots differ
Impact 30%	I1 impact on the photonics and quantum industries, including transferability; I2 economic impact; I3 environmental impact; I4 social impact; I5 productivity and resilience of the SME	I1 is impact on the SME's growth
Excellence 30%	E1 technical quality and innovation against the state of the art; E2 objectives and need; E3 fit to the declared priorities; E4 credibility of the TRL progression	E1 compares the pilot with alternatives; E4 is evidence that the technology is ready for deployment
Implementation 40%	M1 work plan; M2 realism of the duration; M3 appropriateness of the planned use of the grant; M4 quality and measurability of KPIs and milestones; M5 team capacity and track record (joint applications: complementarity)	M5 adds the suitability of the technology provider

Trainings and Services (pp. 28-29): I1 to I2 (competitiveness and growth; the SME's capabilities and skills), E1 to E2 (quality and relevance; need, and why the catalogue does not meet it), M1 to M3 (price justification with the alternative quotation; provider quality; feasibility within the maximum execution period). Missions (p. 28): I1 to I2 (motivation; relevance), E1 to E2 (expertise; fit with the thematic focus), M1 to M2 (engagement with the host ecosystem; profile of the named attendees).

Thresholds, normalisation, ranking

- Thresholds: at least 3 in each of the 3 criteria and at least 10 in total, calculated on normalised scores before weighting; below this a proposal is disqualified (pp. 29-30). Derived estimate: with 3 criteria scored 0 to 5, the unweighted total is at most 15.
- Normalisation corrects each evaluator's average against the overall average. If the divergence is above 20% both after normalisation and in the original scores, a consensus meeting is held, only for proposals above the thresholds; a third evaluator is a last resort (pp. 30-31).
- The number of grants and the waiting list are set per strand (p. 31); EUnita interpretation: ranking is made per strand. Ties go to the higher score on the Impact criterion (Solutions, Pilots, Trainings and Services) or the 'Team Visiting criterion' (Missions); then to the higher score on the Implementation criterion or, for Missions, the 'Interest of the company visiting'; Table 9 (p. 28) lists no Missions criterion under these two names. Then the higher proportion of women, from the figures declared in the form (project team for Solutions and Pilots; personnel involved in the implementation for Trainings and Services; named attendees for Missions) (p. 31).
- An Evaluation Summary Report is prepared for each proposal (p. 32). Appeals: within 5 calendar days of the results, to the helpdesk, on factual errors or wrong eligibility results only; one appeal per proposal; decision within 20 days; a re-evaluation replaces the score without normalisation (pp. 32-33).

11. Application package and timeline

What to submit

- One online form per grant type (Missions: one per mission), completed on the call's online platform, opened from the call page; applicants create an account there (online application form, snapshot of 18 November 2026). 4 sections: contact information, organisation information, grant-specific questions, eligibility self-declaration and Declaration of Honour. Annex 01 of the Guidelines (pp. 37-47) reproduces every question. Other submission routes are not eligible.
- Everything in English. Most answers take 50 to 250 words; the work plan 50 to 500; the Pilots operational setting 50 to 300; TRL justifications 50 to 150. Solutions and Pilots ask for the number of women and the size of the project team; Missions for the number of women among the named attendees (tie-break); the Trainings and Services form has no such field.
- Pilots: the technology provider's letter of commitment, specifying the technology (required, p. 42); an optional PowerPoint of up to 5 slides. Solutions: an optional PowerPoint of up to 5 slides.
- Trainings and Services: quotation 1 (required) and quotation 2 (optional, with a justification if missing), both valid until at least 30 April 2027. Missions: attendee names, roles, decision-making authority and a short introduction each.
- The form can be saved and edited until submission. False information leads to disqualification and exclusion from other PhotonQBoost calls (p. 21). Applicants accept the platform's terms and privacy policy; the company that runs the platform is data controller for submitted data (p. 19).

Helpdesk and technical issues

Helpdesk: photonqboost@eura-ag.de, the only official channel. Answers usually take 2 working days, up to 4 near the deadline; requests sent less than 2 working days before the deadline are not processed. Submit at least 2 days before the deadline; a technical problem must be reported to the helpdesk before the deadline (pp. 22-23). Info Days are online, need prior registration and are recorded (p. 22).

After selection

Legal validation (pp. 33-34): incorporation documents; VAT or tax registration proof; PIC and a Portal screenshot, or the legal entity form; signatory ID; power of attorney; Financial Identification Form; bank statement; a phone number for bank validation; SME declaration; balance sheets and profit and loss accounts for the last 2 closed years (estimates if none has closed); the latest cap table. For companies with linked or associated entities, accounts of the mother companies and group trees are also requested. SMEs that fail to respond or do not submit the complete documentation within the deadline set for the documents are considered non-qualified and excluded from the selection process.

Date	Step	Source
17 November 2026	Call opens	Guidelines p. 17
24 November 2026, 11:00 CET	1st Info Day (online, 11:00 to 12:00; registration)	Guidelines p. 17; call page; news post
17 December 2026, 11:00 CET	2nd Info Day	Guidelines pp. 17, 22
19 January 2027, 17:00 CET	Submission deadline (18:00 in Romania); see section 2 on the Portal's time	Guidelines pp. 17, 21
From 20 January to the last week of February 2027	Evaluation and selection; results communicated in the last week of February (planned)	Guidelines p. 17
March 2027	Legal validation and contracting (planned)	Guidelines p. 17

Date	Step	Source
Beginning of April 2027	Project start and onboarding; standard start of 1 April 2027 (planned), 6-month projects ending 30 September 2027 (Derived estimate)	Guidelines pp. 10, 17, 36
2027-S1 and 2027-S2	Missions in Vilnius and Lannion; exact dates not published	Guidelines p. 15

12. Risks and red flags

Risk	What the documents say	Handling (EUnita interpretation)
Hardware and provider	Solutions projects that are exclusively or predominantly software are 'not the target'; a Pilot needs a described hardware component, a named provider and the provider's letter of commitment; a NO-GO at the alignment check means 'Not aligned' (pp. 11-12, 24-25, 42)	Name the device, provider and site up front; ask the provider for the letter early
Back-loaded cash	Indicative schedule: only EUR 5,000 at Month 1 and at most EUR 20,000 at Month 3, subject to satisfactory progress and KPI achievement; the rest at Month 6 after the final report; the effect of partly met KPIs is not stated (pp. 11-13)	Plan cash for the gap; set KPIs the SME controls and can count
Use of the grant	No cost types are listed for Solutions and Pilots; the form asks which equipment or components the grant supports, and the helpdesk gives no eligibility advice (pp. 22, 39-41)	Describe activities and equipment in the form's own terms; no budget table is asked
Competition	152 applications for 15 Solutions grants last time; no figures yet for OC2-2026 or for Pilots	Compete on precision of the proposal
Eligibility traps	EUR 50,000 cap across all calls; other EU funding or a conflict of interest with a partner fails eligibility; a duration above 6 months is ineligible (pp. 19, 39-40)	Check each criterion before drafting
Trainings and Services	Quotations valid until at least 30 April 2027; contracting before the Sub-Grant Agreement breaks the rule; the budget line is inconsistent (pp. 14, 17)	Obtain 2 quotations; contract only after signature
Text quality	PhotonQBoost may exclude applications showing clear signs of unedited AI output or fabricated information; the applicant must be able to substantiate every claim (p. 20)	Edit and check every statement
Exposure after award	Name, country, purpose and funding may be published; audit access and records kept 5 years (pp. 35-36). Mission attendee changes need prior written approval (pp. 43-44)	Confirm the SME can accept this before applying

13. EUnita recommendations

1. Choose the strand first: a Pilot suits an adopter, a Solution a provider, Trainings and Services an expertise gap, a Mission a partnering aim. Each form is evaluated independently; applying to several does not change the chances, but the EUR 50,000 cap covers all grants; an SME selected for grants above the cap must decline one or more (p. 46).
2. For a Pilot, fix the technology, the provider and the site before drafting, and ask the provider for the letter of commitment at once.
3. Name the thematic priority and the technology domain explicitly: both are alignment-check items that need a GO from both evaluators.
4. Write KPIs and milestones for Months 1, 3 and 6 with baseline figures from the SME's own operations; payments under the indicative schedule depend on them and they are a scored

sub-criterion (M4).

5. Explain the planned use of the grant through activities and equipment, as the form asks, and keep the 6-month plan realistic (M2).
6. For Trainings and Services, check the free catalogue, secure 2 quotations valid until at least 30 April 2027 and do not contract before the Sub-Grant Agreement.
7. Check eligibility yourself, including the partner list in section 8: the helpdesk gives no eligibility advice (p. 22). Send other questions to the helpdesk early: requests sent less than two working days before the deadline are not processed (p. 22).
8. Submit at least 2 days before the deadline and before the earlier of the 2 times shown in section 2 (16:00 Brussels time, which is 17:00 in Romania). Prepare the legal-validation documents in parallel.

Unresolved points

- Deadline time: no document says whether the Portal's key-fact time or the 17:00 CET of the other texts prevails (section 2).
- Second Info Day: its time appears only in the Guidelines; the link to the recordings is not published.
- Trainings and Services: the line total (EUR 100,000) against up to 15 grants of up to EUR 10,000; the length of the maximum execution period.
- Solutions and Pilots: eligible and ineligible cost types; how partly met KPIs affect payments; the payment delay for Pilots.
- Funding rate or co-financing percentage: none stated, although the Declaration of Honour, item 4b, mentions 'any counterpart funding necessary' (full wording in section 9).
- Sub-Grant Agreement text and templates: 'will be provided'. Missions: exact dates within 2027-S1 and 2027-S2.
- Which Guidelines upload governs if they ever differ: FINAL and FINAL-1 are both online.
- OC2-2026 application numbers; grant amounts of the OC2-2025 beneficiaries; the date, budget and rules of the third open call.

Sources

- Guidelines for Applicants OC2-2026, 'FINAL-1' (with Annex 01): https://photonqboost.eu/wp-content/uploads/2026/11/OC2-2026_Guidelines_For_Applicants_FINAL-1.pdf (51 pages; file dated 18 November 2026)
- Guidelines OC2-2026, earlier upload 'FINAL': https://photonqboost.eu/wp-content/uploads/2026/11/OC2-2026_Guidelines_For_Applicants_FINAL.pdf (52 pages; file dated 17 November 2026)
- Call page OC2-2026, with FAQ section and links to the 5 online forms: https://photonqboost.eu/oc2-2026/ (read 18 and 20 November 2026)
- Project general FAQ: https://photonqboost.eu/faq/
- News post: OC2-2026 is now open: https://photonqboost.eu/photonqboost-open-call-oc2-2026-is-now-open/ (18 November 2026)
- EU Funding & Tenders Portal: competitive call 17261: https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/competitive-calls-cs/17261 (18 November 2026)
- CORDIS: project 101177922: https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101177922 (read 19 November 2026)
- Horizon Europe Work Programme, Part 7 (topic HORIZON-CL4-2024-RESILIENCE-01-41, pp. 172-174): https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/wp-call/2023-2024/wp-7-digital-industry-and-space_horizon-2023-2024_en.pdf
- Results of OC2-2025: funded solutions and statistics: https://photonqboost.eu/open-call-ii/ (read 18 November 2026)
- Guidelines for Applicants OC2-2025: https://photonqboost.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/PhotonQBoost_Guidelines_For_Applicants_OC2-2025-1.pdf (38 pages)
- Funded solution: Artemis Analytical: https://photonqboost.eu/funded-solution-artemis/
- Funded solution: CNC Solutions (Lasermett): https://photonqboost.eu/funded-solution-cnc-solution/
- Funded solution: RayVen Laser: https://photonqboost.eu/funded-solution-rayven/
- Open Call #1: Matching Mission to Poland: https://photonqboost.eu/open-call-poland/
- Partners page: https://photonqboost.eu/partners/
- Helpdesk: photonqboost@eura-ag.de (official channel)

Checked 20 November 2026. Official updates prevail.