

UNITA - CALL FOR STARTING GRANTS ON RESEARCH

DESCRIPTION AND RULES

April 2025

Circular Economy and Environment

Following the Circular Economy and Environment Hub matching events respectively held at UNIZAR held on 22nd and 23th January 2025, entitled **“Technical and innovative solutions for environmental sustainability and circular economy”**, and at UVT on 18th and 19th March 2025, entitled **“Social, economic and legal challenges for environmental sustainability and circular economy”**, we invite colleagues to submit research proposals that focus on technical solutions and highlight concrete actions to develop collaborative projects between the academic community, socio-economic stakeholders, and local communities.

Firmly persuaded on the opportunity and interest of our community to foster and consolidate cooperation on the main field of circular economy and environment, the two matching events offered the possibility to exchange ideas and projects focused on different aspects and characterized by different approaches. Based on that, we strongly encourage the submission of **proposals that insist on one of the two main themes tackled during the matching events**.

Proposals may be submitted by scholars in various disciplines, ranging from chemistry, biology, engineering or materials science, but also from economics and law and other social sciences. Interdisciplinary approaches including collaboration across different fields are particularly welcome. Colleagues interested in the initiative must be reminded that it is possible to submit or in any case participate in only one proposal. Therefore, we strongly encourage to identify which of the two general topics is the most appropriate to apply for.

Regarding the theme of **“Technical and innovative solutions for environmental sustainability and circular economy”**, topics of interest may be (but are not limited to):

- Circular economy and/or technical sustainable solutions in various industries (for instance: agri-food, agriculture, chemistry, materials, construction, etc.)
- Environmental recovery and/or monitoring of polluted areas: soil, water, air
- Development of sustainable and/or bio-sourced materials (ex. polymers, textiles, inorganic-based and composite materials)
- Circularity and sustainability in water management, treatment and monitoring
- Waste materials and products: prevention, recovery, recycling and reuse
- Solutions for industrial symbiosis in rural and mountain areas

- Technical assessment of the anthropogenic activities' impact (tourism, transportation, agriculture, deforestation) on urban and rural areas

Regarding the theme of **“Social, economic and legal challenges for environmental sustainability and circular economy”**, topics of interest may be (but are not limited to):

- Socio-economic dimensions and impacts assessment of circular economy or environmental sustainability
- Social, economic and legal challenges of industrial symbiosis
- Assessment/policy/governance of environmental impacts at micro, meso or macro levels
- Educational transposition of issues related to environmental sustainability
- Legal perspectives of circular economy or environmental sustainability
- Challenges in sustainability reporting, green finance and sustainable investment
- Circularity in rural and/or mountain areas: repurposing spaces and business opportunities
- Innovative business models for the circular economy and environmental sustainability
- Marketing for circular economy or environmental sustainability

Article 1. Background

1. The first phase of UNITA (2020-2023) has initiated deep transformation in the member universities that will continue and fully roll out during the second phase (2023-2027) and beyond, also integrating the new partners and associated ones.
2. Our long-term vision is to transform the way we cooperate, educate, do research, innovate, and reach out to society. In the coming years and in an expanded structure, the UNITA alliance intends to contribute to the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area and to the full roll-out of the European Universities Initiative. To make our vision a reality, we have agreed on a work plan for the coming four years and defined milestones for the period after.
3. After a very successful pilot phase, the UNITA consortium is convinced that a very strong commitment of everyone in their institutions is needed to achieve the ambitious objectives it has set itself: contributing to the educational, scientific and cultural progress of our regions, fostering their sustainable development, strengthening the local innovation ecosystems supporting their transition to a knowledge-based economy, whilst promoting and accelerating European integration within and beyond them.
4. Therefore, it has been decided to devote a significant part of its budget to support the creation of transnational thematic and interdisciplinary groups, through grants attributed to the projects they initiate together. This seed money will accelerate the development of those groups of educators, researchers and innovators who share a common interest in a field of knowledge and want to develop the field further by exchanging good practices and launching joint projects.

Article 2. Goals and objectives

1. As rural, mountain, and cross-border territories, our regions face specific, similar challenges, such as depopulation, brain drain, more costly public services, and core-periphery dynamics added up to global ones such as climate change, digital divide and aging population.
2. By achieving unprecedented levels of transnational cooperation and seamless mobility, the alliance will be able to respond to these challenges with all the strengths of a large, diverse and vibrant university community.
3. Therefore, this call for projects aims at strengthening collaboration between UNITA partners through the implementation of projects in the field of Circular Economy and Environment, contributing to the sharing of best practices and results, as well as to the transfer of innovations from one region to
4. The objectives of this call are as follows:
 - a. To promote the creation/evolution/development of UNITA academic and research communities.
 - b. To promote thematic areas and/or methodological approaches that will enable the development of long-term academic and scientific cooperation.
 - c. To support scientific partnerships of common interest with a structuring effect, i.e. directing or encouraging the development of larger-scale research projects, the consolidation of innovative interdisciplinary scientific issues, and the creation of partnership transfer and valorisation mechanisms.
 - d. Encourage closer links with actors from outside the academic world: the public, semi-public, private and non-profit sectors.
 - e. Encourage the launch of European projects by supporting preparatory studies and research.
5. Projects may take the following forms (non-exhaustive list):
 - a. Preparation of a collaborative research project with a view to submission to national and/or European calls for projects.
 - b. Organization of an event, conference, thematic seminar or summer or winter school, etc.
 - c. Organization of meetings to set up training, joint research, credited internships, etc.
 - d. Creation of courses linking research and education, for instance in the form of micro credentials between universities.
 - e. Visiting periods of professors, researchers, doctoral students, students and/or technical or administrative staff.

Article 3. Themes

1. Considered that in line with the principle of efficiency the present initiative merges two calls related to different matching events, proposals must be submitted with specific regard to one of the two subjects tackled in the matching event that took place in Universidad de Zaragoza (UNIZAR) or in Universitatea de Vest din Timisoara, respectively in January and March 2025. Proposals are accepted in all the possible variants and declination of the subjects tackled in the referred initiatives.
2. Multidisciplinary projects are particularly welcome.

Article 4. Glossary

- UNITA Full Partner (UFP): Academic institutions from UE countries which have the role either of beneficiaries or of coordinating institution in the European project UNITA. The UNITA full partners are funded by the European commission acting as the Granting Authority (Grant agreement Project 101124853 — UNITA, Annex 1 Description of Action part A, p. 4): UBI, IPG, UPNA, UNIZAR, UPPA, USMB, UNITO, UNIBS, UVT, UTBV).
- UNITA Associated Partner (UAP): Academic institutions from non-UE countries which have the role of “associated partner” in the European project UNITA and does not receive funding from the Granting Authority (Consortium agreement UNITA Universitas Montium – Grant agreement no 101124853, 2024, p. 7): HES-SO, CHNU.
- UNITA Partners (UP): all institutions that are members of the UNITA Alliance (UFP and UAP).
- UNITA Geminae Partners (UGP): Higher Education Institutions located outside the European Union and which are members of the Geminae Program.
- Principal Investigator (PI): is the coordinator of the research project team (must be a permanent member of the teaching staff or a researcher from one of the UNITA Partners). The PI will be responsible for the scientific reporting of the project and will serve as point of contact, representing the entire team.
- Team Leader (TL): is the local coordinator of each UNITA Partner team that composes the research project team.
- Team Member (TM): member of the research project team, other than PI or TL.
- Beneficiary(ies): research project team (or teams) members, whose project has been selected to be financed under this call or any other Starting grant call.

Article 5. Eligibility

1. To be eligible, a project must be submitted by at least three different UNITA Partners of the UNITA Alliance. A higher number of participating countries will grant the project a better ranking during the evaluation process.
2. Each project is led by a member of the teaching staff or a researcher from a UNITA Partner, who acts as Principal Investigator, responsible for the scientific reporting of the project, based on the template that will be provided, and who will serve as point of contact, representing the entire research project team.
3. Each partner university that composes the research project team must be formed by, at least, a Team leader. The local team can include other teaching staff members, researchers, post-docs, and PhD candidates (referred to as Team Members).
4. Each Principal Investigator, Team Leader and Team Member can only participate in one project proposal per call. In the case of different calls open at the same time, it is possible to submit or take part in only one proposal. Grants beneficiaries may not apply nor be involved in a proposal for a further UNITA starting grant.
5. UNITA Associated Partners and UNITA Geminae Partners are encouraged to participate in this call and join the research project teams, without requesting funding.
6. The maximum duration of a project is 12 months, including any preparatory phase.
7. PI and Team leaders must maintain *the status* as an employee of their institution for the whole duration of the project. If any team member leaves the project, the institution must appoint a replacement, who must be approved by all team members.
8. After the application deadline and before the evaluation and selection phase, compliance with administrative and eligibility requirements will be verified, in accordance with Article 8 of this Regulation (Article 8. Administrative Review of Applications).

Article 6. Funding and Budgeting

1. This call finances projects up to a maximum of €15.000 for three partners, a maximum of €20.000 for four partners, and a maximum of €25.000 for 5 partners or more, eventually not evenly distributed among the partners.
2. The maximum amount to be attributed per partner is €7.000. In case of HES-SO, the maximal amount would be CHF 5000.- per grant and will be given in CHF. The amount awarded cannot be transferred to other partners.
3. These amounts are in any case a maximum and can be adapted depending on the project. For the selected projects, the Principal Investigator and the Team Leaders from each partner university will contact the UNITA OFFICE, to use the budget in accordance with the internal regulations of each university. Please note that the grants financed by the funding of the European Commission may not fund any expenses in Switzerland. For further clarifications, please contact UNITA office HES-SO.

4. Eligible expenses:
 - a. Travel, accommodation and subsistence costs for events or project meetings that take place in the countries of the UFP UNITA (maximum 60% of the total budget).
 - b. Joint communication, dissemination and publication costs.
 - c. Logistical costs and costs of organizing meetings (including costs for coffee breaks and meals) that take place in the countries of the full partner universities in UNITA.
 - d. Costs relating to the hiring of students and/or research assistants (maximum 30% of the funds granted).
 - e. Consumables (maximum 40% of the total budget).
5. After the final results, the teams whose projects are selected will receive confirmation of the exact amount of funding the project will receive, as well as the amount that will be allocated to each university that is part of the respective project.
6. All expenses are subject to the restrictions of each partner university, based on their internal regulations and also based on European regulations. If situations of budget restrictions are identified, which lead to a reduction in the value of project financing, the Principal Investigator of a selected project will be notified, in order to express his/her acceptance or refusal to continue in the program.

Article 7. Application

1. Applications are open from 04/04/2025 until 12/05/2025 until 23:59 CET.

Applications shall be submitted by responding to the following lime-survey accessible at

<https://surveysbg.univ-unita.eu/index.php/966633?lang=en>

2. Each application must be submitted by the Principal Investigator of the project, containing the following documents:
 - a. Overview/description of the project (including its scientific relevance, originality, added value, with description of expenses/budget allocation/project's timeline).
 - b. Description of the composition of each research project team (PI, TL, TM).
 - c. Curriculum Vitae (CV) of the Principal Investigator and CV of each Team Leader who is part of the team. CV should not exceed 3 pages, with major research projects and 10 most relevant publications.
 - d. A full list of all the members of the research group with their full names, home university and position
 - e. Document signed by all team leaders and PI, attesting:
 - a. they participate in only one project

- b. they are permanent staff for the whole duration of the project
- c. they acknowledge all the application rules

Article 8. Administrative Review of Applications

1. After the application deadline and prior to the evaluation and selection phase, there will be a verification of compliance with administrative and eligibility requirements, focusing on the following aspects:
 - Consent to participate: Document signed by all participants
 - Academic status of the participants, ensuring the presence during the project
 - Budget
 - Control of participation in more than one project.
2. If a non-compliance is identified, the Principal Investigator will be informed. A five working-days period/deadline, to be counted from the working day after the notification date, will be granted for rectifying non-compliances.
3. Proposals that do not meet all requirements and that are not rectified within the deadline defined in this article, will not be evaluated. In case of no compliance with the document dimension established in the call or in the form, the evaluation committees will take into consideration only the part of the documents that fall within the limit.

Article 9. Evaluation and selection

The projects that comply with administrative and eligibility requirements will be evaluated and selected in two phases:

- a. FIRST PHASE (Evaluation by Local Committees):

The first phase of evaluation will be made by Local Committees of each of the UNITA Partners. Each Local Committee will be composed by, at least, the Vice Rector/President on Research or a delegate, the local responsible of the concerned Hub or a delegate, a Senior Research Manager, and a representative from the UNITA Management Committee (Task 1.2). Members of the local committees cannot be involved in the projects evaluated. The local committees' compositions will be shared on the UNITA website.

Projects will be evaluated and ranked by Local Committees, with each Local Committee evaluating only those projects in which the respective university is part of a research project team. Evaluation and ranking will be carried out based on the following criteria:

- The scientific relevance of the project and its coherence with the call's topic. (25%)

- Expected results of the project for the development of UNITA communities. Proposal that involve research groups from three or more Countries are strongly encouraged and shall be better ranked. (20%)
 - The leverage effect of the project beyond the funding (prospects for external funding). (15%)
 - A coherent and clearly formulated work plan. (10%)
 - The originality and value of the interdisciplinary approach. (10%)
 - Feasibility of the project. (10%)
 - Links with actors from outside the academic world. (10%)
- b. SECOND PHASE (Evaluation by International Committee):

The second phase of evaluation will be made by the International Committee, which is composed by one representative designated by each university (Vice Rector/President on Research or a delegate).

The International Committee will select the projects, considering:

- The results of the first phase of selection (projects with the best ratings given by Local Committees).
 - The criteria for evaluation and ranking (applied on the first phase of selection).
 - The number of grants to be awarded in the call.
 - Priority will be given to projects involving a larger number of UNITA academic partners.
2. Once the evaluation phase has been completed, if there is any situation of budgetary restriction that leads to a reduction in the value of the project's financing, the Principal Investigator of the selected project will be notified, to express his/her acceptance or refusal to continue in the program. In case of notification, the Principal Investigator will have five working days to refuse this budgetary reduction. Without any answer, the reduction will be considered as accepted.
 3. The final result of the evaluation and the selected projects will be communicated to the Principal Investigator of each research project team by email. The list of financed projects will also be published on the UNITA website, in accordance with the deadlines defined in Article 14 of this Regulation (Article 14. Timeline). Applicants interested may ask for further information to local UNITA OFFICES.

Article 10. Obligations of the Beneficiaries

1. The selected projects must be completed within a period of 12 months, including any preparatory phase.
2. Beneficiaries agree to provide information on UNITA's and European Union's support for their project. This will take the form of the use of the UNITA and Erasmus+ logos on all communication media

and during events linked with the project. Beneficiaries also agree to present their work in case a restitution event is organised.

3. The UNITA OFFICES may ask to the Principal Investigator the status of the projects' activities during the project lifetime.
4. The final report must be submitted by the Beneficiaries once the project is completed. This report should be sent within 20 working days after the end of the project.
5. The final report must be sent to UNITA OFFICE of the Principal Investigator university. Detailed information about the reports will be sent to all PI, at the beginning of the projects.
6. The beneficiaries will have to produce a short description of the project and of their results for publication on the Research website of UNITA, according to a template provided.

Article 11. Intellectual Property and Industrial Property Rights

1. By registering for this call, participants certify that the projects submitted are their own authorship, that they do not belong to third parties and are not protected by any copyright.
2. Participants will be responsible for any third-party claims in relation to intellectual property rights, whether industrial property rights and copyrights, in accordance with the applicable law in their respective country.
3. In the case that during the project development new intellectual properties are generated, an agreement between the partner universities shall be set up. The use of Creative Commons licences (<https://creativecommons.org/share-your-work/>) is encouraged.

Article 12. Omissions and Additional Information

1. Any situation not covered by this Regulation will be jointly considered and resolved in first instance by all UNITA Offices. Should they jointly declare themselves non-competent in the issue, they will transfer or escalate it to the co-leaders of T2.3, who, in turn, can resolve it or, should it be the case, further escalate it following UNITA's procedures
2. For any additional information, participants can contact directly the UNITA Office at the respective university, according to the list of emails below:
 - a. UBI: unita.office@ubi.pt
 - b. IPG: unita@ipg.pt
 - c. UPNA: unita@unavarra.es
 - d. UNIZAR: unitacontact@unizar.es
 - e. UPPA: unita@univ-pau.fr
 - f. USMB: unita.office@univ-smb.fr

- g. HES-SO: unita@hes-so.ch
- h. UNITO: unita@unito.it
- i. UNIBS: unita.office@unibs.it
- j. UVT: unita@e-uvt.ro
- k. UNITBV: unita@unitbv.ro
- l. CHNU: unita unita@chnu.edu.ua

Article 13. Final Dispositions

1. The participation in the call implies full acceptance of these rules.
2. The UNITA Partners, as organizers of this call, do not assume any responsibility for applications that are not in perfect condition or that are lost for reasons beyond the control of the organizers.
3. The UNITA Partners reserve the right to modify this regulation for reasons of force majeure.

Article 14. Timeline

Launch of the call	4th of April 2025
Closure of the call	12th of May 2025
Administrative review	1 week + working-days to amend only eligibility issues
Evaluation by Local Committees (First Phase)	1 month maximum
Evaluation by International Committee (Second Phase)	1 month maximum
Final Result notification (with reasons for rejection)	2 weeks maximum
Access to information about the results	5 days
Latest project start date	25th of August 2025
Project duration	12 Months
Final Report submission	20 working days after the end of the project