

Call for Challenge-Based Collaborative Research Projects

1. Context of the Call

*Challenge-based research (CBR)¹ differs from traditional academic research in a fundamental way: Instead of starting from a gap in the existing literature or a theoretical question, CBR takes as its point of departure a real-world problem or a challenge identified by stakeholders such as businesses, public authorities, civil society organisations, or citizens. The research question is then shaped around this challenge, with the explicit goal of arriving at implementable solutions. In the context of the **COLOURS European University Alliance** (COLaborative innOvative sUustainable Regional UniverSities), these challenges are framed within the **Triple Transition**: green, digital, and social. CBR is therefore inherently applied and collaborative: It requires researchers to work not only across disciplines, but also together with the communities and organisations that experience these challenges first-hand, treating them as co-creators of knowledge rather than merely as subjects of study.*

2. Objectives

The COLOURS European University Alliance invites its community of PhD students, researchers, academic staff, and Associated Partners of the COLOURS Alliance from all disciplines to submit proposals for Challenge-Based Collaborative Research Projects.

It aims to mobilise the COLOURS community around shared regional problems and to transform traditional academic excellence into a model closely linked to regional innovation ecosystems. These projects are intended to bridge the gap between formal knowledge and real-world

¹ CBR- The concept of a "challenge-based approach" to research is rooted in the European Commission's Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe framework programmes, where it refers to bringing together resources and knowledge across different fields, technologies and disciplines to address major societal challenges (see Regulation (EU) No 1291/2013, Pillar III; Regulation (EU) 2021/695, Pillar II "Global Challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness"). For a detailed elaboration of challenge-based research (CBR) as a methodology for European universities, see ECIU University, "Challenge-Based Research for a Stronger and More Sustainable Europe" (2022), available at www.eciu.eu.

impact, addressing urgent societal issues through an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approach.

The Alliance provides grants of up to €15,000 per project to fund the physical mobility needed for cross-border collaboration. The Alliance expects to fund at least 3 projects; additional projects may be supported if financial resources allow. This is a unique opportunity to build international research networks across the Alliance and to lay the groundwork for larger joint funding applications.

Projects must align with the core objectives of the COLOURS Alliance:

- Address challenges: Focus on finding solutions for problems related to the Triple Transition (green, digital, and social).
- Regional impact: Address specific challenges proposed by regional stakeholders (public authorities, industry, civil society) in line with COLOURS regional Smart Specialisation Goals (Green Transition, IT & Digitalisation, Health & Wellbeing, Food Production) and with its joint understanding of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion.
- Collaborative innovation: Foster co-creation between the COLOURS partner universities.

Proposed projects should:

- Target a specific, identifiable challenge related to the green, digital, or social transition, ideally one raised or validated by regional stakeholders (public authorities, employers, civil society organisations, citizens).
- Involve researchers from at least two COLOURS partner universities working together, with complementary expertise and a clear division of tasks.
- Aim for tangible outcomes — not only academic publications but also results with practical value, such as policy recommendations, prototypes, educational tools, or pilot interventions.
- Aim for sustainability beyond the project period. Teams are encouraged to use the project as a stepping stone toward external funding applications, prototype development, or the creation of new initiatives (start-ups, social enterprises, civic organisations, etc.).

3. Eligibility and application requirements



- **Applicants:** The call is open to researchers, academic staff, early-career scholars, and PhD students from all nine COLOURS partner universities.
- **Research collaborative teams:** Teams must include at least one member holding a doctoral degree (PhD). The lead applicant may be a PhD candidate or early-career researcher. Teams can further include researchers, professors, and Associated Partners (a list of associate partners is available on the COLOURS website).
- **Partnerships:** Proposals must involve collaborative teams from at least two different COLOURS universities. Involvement of regional stakeholders is highly encouraged.

Applications may be submitted by one member of the research team acting on behalf of all project participants. Proposals must be completed using the official application form provided for this call.

The completed form, together with any required supporting documentation, must be submitted by **15 July 2026** to: colours@venta.lv

Late or incomplete applications will not be considered.

4. Funding and Duration

The COLOURS Alliance provides funding for short-term physical mobility, enabling teams to attend joint working sessions at different COLOURS partner institutions and to collaborate on challenge-based research directly linked to the project's objectives.

Applicants can request up to 15,000€ per project. This financial contribution is strictly intended as a grant to cover travel and subsistence expenses for the duration of the project and cannot be allocated for other project costs.

Each member institution of COLOURS equally contributes to the Challenge-Based Research Fund. For selected projects, each team member's travel expenses will be reimbursed by their home university, or they will receive the allocated amount in accordance with their home university's procedures.

Projects must be completed by **30 November 2027**.



5. Evaluation criteria

Proposals will be assessed by a Selection Committee comprising 1 Open Education representative from each partner institution, at least 3 Student Forum representatives, and external experts (if relevant).

Each proposal will be scored on a scale of 0 to 100 points, based on the following six criteria:

#	Evaluation Criterion	Max. Points
1	Relevance and Challenge Orientation <i>Does the proposal address a clearly identified real-world challenge linked to the Triple Transition (green, digital, social)? Is the challenge grounded in a concrete regional problem, ideally raised or validated by stakeholders?</i>	20
2	Scientific and Methodological Quality <i>Is the research approach and methodologically suited to the challenge? Does the interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary dimension add value to the proposed work?</i>	20
3	Team Competence and Research Experience <i>Does the team demonstrate relevant expertise for the proposed challenge? This includes prior research, publications, or applied project experience. For early-career researchers, relevant training and demonstrated potential are equally considered.</i>	15
4	Feasibility and Work Plan <i>Is the work plan realistic in terms of budget, timeline, and team capacity? Are tasks clearly defined and distributed across partner institutions?</i>	15
5	Expected Impact and Sustainability <i>What outcomes will the project produce? Is there potential for continuation beyond the funding period through follow-up funding, new partnerships, or spin-off initiatives?</i>	20
6	Collaboration, Diversity, and Inclusion <i>Does the proposal demonstrate meaningful cooperation across COLOURS partner institutions? Does it actively involve early-career researchers and reflect a commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion in team composition and research design?</i>	10
	Total	100

In case of equal scores, priority will be given to proposals with higher scores in Criteria 1 and 5 (Relevance and Impact).

The results will be announced by 31 July 2026.



6. Reporting Requirements

At the conclusion of the project, beneficiaries must submit a final report outlining the research activities undertaken, the results achieved, and the extent to which the project objectives were met. The report must provide appropriate documentation of all major activities carried out during the implementation period, including outputs produced, collaborative activities undertaken, dissemination activities, any relevant evidence of impact, and potential follow-up projects.

At the end of the funding period, all project teams will be invited to present their research outcomes at a joint COLOURS event (online or on-site, depending on the situation), sharing results with the broader Alliance community. Further details on the format and timing of this event will be communicated to funded teams.

Teams are strongly encouraged to aim for at least one joint peer-reviewed publication resulting from the project, as evidence of the collaborative research undertaken.

Application Template: Challenge-Based Collaborative Research Projects Proposals

Project name:

PART 1: General Information

Details

Project Title	[complete]
Lead Applicant Name	[complete]
Home Institution	[complete]
Department/Faculty	[complete]
Position (PhD Student/Researcher/Academic Staff/ECR)	[complete]
Collaborating Partners	[complete]
Expected Start & End Dates	[complete: DD/MM/YYYY to DD/MM/YYYY]

PART 2: Project Description

1. Project Summary: *Provide a summary of the proposed collaborative research, including the interdisciplinary approach (Max. 200 words).*



2. Link to COLOURS Objectives & Challenges: Identify which dimension of the Triple Transition (Green, Digital, Social) and which challenge this project addresses. Explain the specific regional challenge being tackled. [max 300 words]

3. Working Plan and regional team composition: Describe the research activities, the methodology for co-creation with the team, and address collaborative tasks between the partner universities, and any eventual collaboration with stakeholders. [max 500 words]

4. Expected Outputs and Impact: Describe the main results expected (e.g., joint peer-reviewed publication, research advancements on the topic, collaborative seminars, public event, prototype, policy brief, educational module) and how they contribute to the regional innovation ecosystem. [max 500 words]

5. Dissemination Plan: Outline how outcomes will be shared within the COLOURS Alliance and with the broader public. [max 300 words]

PART 3: Budget

Requested or **estimated** budget for travel, subsistence, accommodation and travel dates.

#	Activity / purpose	Travellers & home institution	Host institution	Travel dates	Days	Transport mode & cost (€)	* Accommodation nights × €/night	* Per diem days × €/day	Event total (€)
1	e.g. Kick-off meeting	Name(s) – Institution A	Institution B	DD/MM/YYYY to DD/MM/YYYY	–	e.g. Economy flight – €	– × €	– × €	€
2									€
3									€
4									€
5									€
Total requested									€
Total requested for person A (Name(s) – Institution)									€
Total requested for person B Name(s) – Institution)									€
Total requested for person C Name(s) – Institution)									€

* Per diem and accommodation rates should follow the applicable rules of the traveller's home institution.

PART 4: Declarations & Support

- CV of the applicants
- Letter of intent or commitment of associated partners/stakeholders/other organisations

Submit your application via e-mail to colours@venta.lv by 15 July 2026

If you have any other questions, please contact your university's COLOURS representative or write to the coordinator of this collaborative project: kristiana.balode@venta.lv

