

# STAIRWAY

## Guidelines

### Expression-of-Interest for AI experts

October 2021 - 30th May, 2023

## List of acronyms

AI: Artificial Intelligence

EC: European Commission

Eoi: Expressions of Interest

FSTP: Financial Support for Third Parties

DoA: Description of Action

GA: Grant Agreement

HPC: High-Performance Computing

SME: Small and Medium Enterprise



## 1. About StairwAI

The StairwAI project targets low-tech users with the goal of facilitating their engagement on the AI on-demand Platform. This will be achieved through a new service layer enriching the functionalities of the on-demand platform and containing:

- a **multilingual interaction layer** enabling conversations with the Platform in the user's own language,
- a **horizontal matchmaking service** for the automatic discovery of AI assets (tools, data sets, AI experts, consultants, papers, courses etc.) meeting the user business needs and
- a **vertical matchmaking service** that will dimension and provision hardware resources through a proper hardware provider (HPC, Cloud and Edge infrastructures).

These services are designed and implemented by using techniques in an AI for AI fashion. The AI techniques deployed in the development of the services are natural language processing for the multilingual interaction, constraint solving, optimization and machine learning for horizontal and vertical matchmaking, knowledge representation for organizing the platform AI assets, reputation and fairness mechanisms to improve the matching results.

## 2. Expression of Interest Call for AI experts

### 2.1. Why a call for AI experts?

StairwAI is pushing a sustainable market building on automatic mechanisms for support and expertise provision that, given an experiment and given the user skills of the company, identifies the best AI expert to satisfy the end user needs. In this way, StairwAI expects to have a relevant impact on how AI experts collaborate to support innovation finding on the AI-on-demand platform a space for expanding their networks.

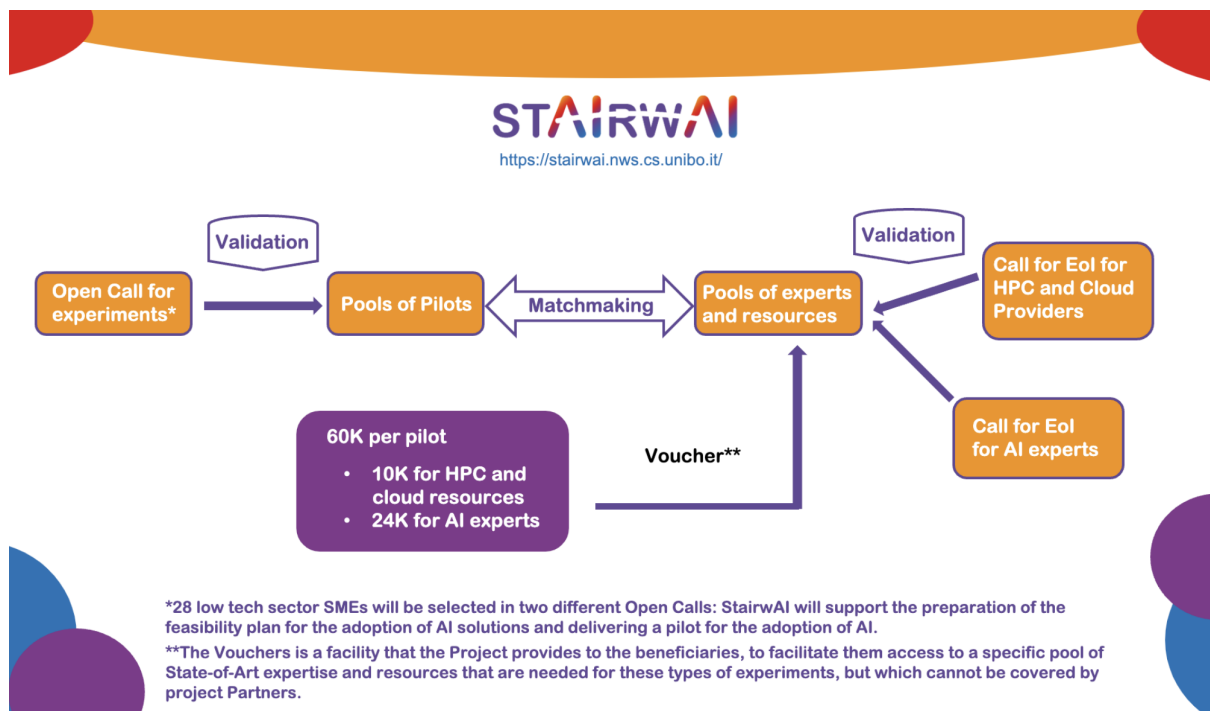
The project will make use of the Financial Support to Third Parties [FSTP] scheme to identify disruptive bottom-up projects contributing to the adoption of AI by SMEs in low tech sectors. To this end, a process has been defined to choose up to 60 SMEs in low tech sectors by launching 3 Open Calls (2 Pilot open call and 1 Adopter Open call). **Each Pilot will receive up to 60,000 EUR**, including up to **24,000 EUR to cover the AI experts** and up to 10,000 EUR to cover the costs of HPC cloud infrastructure and services<sup>1</sup>.

In parallel to the 2 open calls for pilots, this **Expression of Interest call for External AI experts** has been launched. The goal of the EoI call for External AI experts is **to select AI experts who will work and support** the SMEs in executing their pilots. The EoI call for External AI experts focuses on the validation of **candidates to be included in a pool of experts to do the matchmaking between them and the Low-Tech SMEs at the beginning of the program.**

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<sup>1</sup> Another call for AI providers has been launched.





## 2.2. Who are we looking for

We are looking for natural persons and legal entities with the registered residency established in EU member states, the UK, or in one of the Associated Countries to support the selected low-tech SMEs by providing them with knowledge and support on AI to run their experiments.

This call for AI experts will remain open from October 2021 until May 30th 2023.

The AI Experts who want to participate in the process need to apply to this EoI and once validated they will be included in a pool of AI experts where the matchmaking between the SMEs needs and the AI experts will be done.

AI experts should provide their specific expertise in AI techniques so that the matchmaking is as accurate as possible.

## 2.3. The role of the AI experts

The amount of resources, methods and techniques to adopt AI is very high and there are a wide number of resources, therefore targeted support will be needed from AI experts. The Support Program is articulated as a totally customised service, where AI Experts will be specifically validated to fit the needs of the SMEs and guide them along the whole Program.

Validated AI experts will:



- Analyse the requirements of the pilot and sign an agreement with the selected SMEs, covering the conditions of the support.
- Contact and interface with the pilot as well as with the StairwAI project.
- Direct pilots to use tools, algorithms, services to satisfy their requirements and solve the doubts in the process.
- Maintain a good relationship with the pilots with regular meetings.

## 2.4. Technical requirements

Candidates should have following basic qualifications:

- An Engineering Degree, Computer Science, Physics, Mathematics or equivalent
- 2+ years of relevant experience participating in AI projects
- Excellent written and verbal communications skills (English)

Preferred Qualifications:

- PhD. on any AI related field.
- Project Management Experience
- Experience working with or in companies

## 3. How to submit an Expression of Interest

Those interested in submitting an application should register at the [Funding Box platform](#) and fill the Application form.

The Funding Box platform will be the main interface for managing the proposal application process and to solve any doubt related to the application.

## 4. Selection process

### 4.1. Eligibility criteria

- **Language:** All applications should be submitted in English
- **Country:** Applicants should have the registered residency or be established in EU member states, the UK, or in one of the Associated Countries
- **Experience:** Have more than 2 years of experience



## 4.2. Evaluation criteria

The criteria, to homologate the entities which candidate to provide services to the pilots are:

- C1. Proven expertise and experience supporting SMEs in similar activities (e.g. previous contributions to develop AI solutions for industry related organisations, etc).
- C2. Access to APIs, datasets or other tools to allow the smooth implementation of the pilots.
- C3. Good writing and oral skills in English.
- C4. Discount offered in the price of the services regarding the market conditions.

## 4.3. Selection process

A Selection Committee will be created to assess the Expressions of Interest of the candidates.

The proposal submission and selection procedure will be done through the 'FundingBox Platform'. All potential voucher suppliers will be validated by the following StairwAI consortium partners: EGI, UNIBO, BCA, INFN, TIL, according to the eligibility, evaluation criteria mentioned above and the selection process (timeline). We will take into consideration the existence of potential conflict of interest among the applicants and one or more of the Consortium partners. Consortium partners, employees and permanent collaborators cannot take part in the StairwAI programme. All cases of potential conflict of interest will be assessed on a case by case basis.

## 5. Becoming a StairwAI AI expert

### 5.1. Selection Process (Timeline)

The timeline for involving the candidates in the StairwAI project follows the next process:

- This Call for External AI experts will remain open from October 2021 until May 30th 2023.
- The validated AI experts will be published on the AI4EU platform.
- Once the SMEs are selected and in the first phase of the support program (feasibility study), a matchmaking will be done between the beneficiary SMEs –according to their needs- and the AI experts.
- The Mentoring Committee will validate the matches.
- Once validated the low Tech SMEs will sign an agreement with the AI experts to agree the conditions of the service.
- Once the agreements are signed they must be provided to the coordinator of StairwAI UNIBO, and FBA.
- Payment will be done from the beneficiary SMEs to the AI expert once the service has been delivered and approved by the StairwAI consortium.



## 5.2. How the AI experts will be funded

A voucher mechanism will be articulated to provide support to FSTP beneficiaries in areas where the specific support needed cannot be covered by project partners. This Voucher is a resource that the Project provides to facilitate them access to a specific pool of State-of-Art expertise and resources. The beneficiaries of the FSTP will be the Low-Tech SMEs that will receive the voucher to pay the AI experts. **This means that the AI experts will be directly paid by the SMEs running the pilots (24000 Eur).**

## 5.3. Participation rules

The following participation rules will be applied:

- Only proposals submitted through the online form will be evaluated.
- Applicants will have to verify the completeness of the form, as it won't be possible to add any further information after its submission.
- Only one proposal per entity is admitted in this StairwAI EoI. If more than one application is identified, only the last application which has been submitted in order of time will be evaluated.
- All applications must be written in English in all mandatory parts to be eligible. Only parts written in English will be evaluated.
- All mandatory sections of the application must be completed. The data provided should be actual, true, complete and should allow assessment of the proposal.

## 6. Contact

For more information about the StairwAI EoI for HPC Cloud Providers and EoI for AI experts, please check our StairwAI EoI microsite: <https://stairwai.fundingbox.com/>

If you have any extra questions regarding our EoI process you can send us a message to [elisa.cauhe@egi.eu](mailto:elisa.cauhe@egi.eu).

In case of any technical issues or problems, please include the following information in your message:

- your username, telephone number and your e-mail address,
- details of the specific problem (error messages you encountered, bugs descriptions, i.e. if a dropdown list is not working, etc.),
- screenshots of the problem.

StairwAI will organize various Q&A Online Sessions for HPC Cloud providers and AI experts about this EoI. The events will be announced via the StairwAI official channels.

