GUIDELINES

Bridge4Water
Call round 2026

BRIDGE 4WATER

Connecting Water Research through Open Innovation

eit Water

Co-funded by the European Union

POUL DUE JENSEN GRUNDFOS FOUNDATION

1. INTRODUCTION

These guidelines describe the process and requirements for applying to the Bridge4Water call round 2026, including the scientific scope, eligibility criteria, application process, review procedure, and obligations for funded projects.

The 2026 Bridge4Water call is a pilot initiative aligned with the ambitions of the EIT Water Knowledge and Innovation Community (KIC). It is aligned to the EIT Water Innovation Mechanism, Action Programme 6 called Open Innovation Booster and thematically will contribute to address Challenge 4: Limited water efficiency, recycling, and resource circularity, supporting the transition towards circular and resilient water systems in Europe.

Bridge4Water is an Open Innovation in Science (OIS) research platform supporting early-stage, precompetitive university–industry collaboration on shared challenges in industrial and urban water systems. OIS focuses on generating foundational knowledge, data, and methods with broad applicability across the water sector.

This call is aligned to the EIT Water Start-Up Grant Agreement (SUGA) and is supported by a philanthropic donation from the Poul Due Jensen / Grundfos Foundation. As Aarhus University is the coordinator of EIT Water in 2026, then all pilot activities will also be coordinated by Aarhus University. This particular OIS pilot activity is being carried out in collaboration with Co-Location North Host: Water Valley Denmark.

Bridge4Water will operate under a non-negotiable open innovation framework: Projects must be co-created by academic and industry partners, funding is allocated exclusively to non-profit research organisations, whereas companies contribute in-kind. All results and data must be shared openly without intellectual property restrictions, enabling broad reuse and downstream innovation.

Please consult Bridge4Water's Privacy Policy for more information on how the applications and your personal data are handled. The Privacy Policy can be found here: Resources

Facts about the call

Total amount available for granting:
EUR 1,350,000

Amount available per grant:
EUR 270,000

Scope

- Industrial water efficiency and circularity
- Water efficiency and circularity in urban built environments

Deadlines:

- Upload idea: 01 June 2026
- Contact local advisor: 16 June 2026
- Submission of applications: 01 July 2026

Notification of funding
Primo August 2026

Earliest start date:
1 September 2026

Latest end date:
31 December 2027

Contact:

Martin Andersen
Programme Manager
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1.1. About Bridge4Water

Open Innovation in Science (OIS) enables academia and industry to co-create solutions to shared challenges through open, precompetitive research, generating knowledge and data that can be widely reused.

Bridge4Water is a research and innovation platform supporting early-stage, use-inspired research addressing key challenges in industrial and urban water systems. As a pilot initiative in 2026, the programme aims to stimulate new collaborations between universities, industry, and other stakeholders working with water technologies and solutions.

The programme is closely aligned with, and designed to support, the establishment of the EIT Water Knowledge and Innovation Community (KIC). During the EIT Water Start-Up Grant Agreement (SUGA) year, it contributes to activating the research and innovation community through pilot projects, ideation activities, and open knowledge generation—helping establish partnerships and research directions for future EIT Water action programmes.

Bridge4Water is aligned to the EIT Water Innovation Mechanism, Action Programme 6 called Open Innovation Booster under the EIT Water initiative. The Innovation Mechanism should deliver impact aligned to the EIT Water defined Strategic Objectives reflecting key sector challenges. In the 2026 pilot, the programme focuses on Strategic Objective 4: Water-smart and circular water management systems (SO4), enabling testing of the open innovation model and generating insights for broader implementation from 2027.

The programme functions as a pre-competitive research funding mechanism where academic and industry partners jointly explore shared challenges. Projects generate openly accessible knowledge, methods, data, and tools for broad use across the research and innovation ecosystem.

By enabling open collaboration and rapid proof-of-concept projects, Bridge4Water strengthens the foundation for water innovation, builds cross-sector partnerships, and advances sustainable and circular water solutions in Europe and beyond.

1.2. Why OIS?

Bridge4Water is based on the Open Innovation in Science (OIS) approach, which enables open research collaborations between universities and companies. Within this framework, all project results are published openly, allowing both researchers and industry partners to accelerate innovation and development activities. As results are not protected by intellectual property rights, they can be freely used and further developed for downstream applications.

Collaborating in an open project allows participants to:

- Establish new collaborations between academia and industry through facilitated matchmaking and fast project initiation based on standard agreements without IP negotiations
- Access new knowledge and robust data to address shared technical challenges and overcome common barriers across the sector
- Build on a strong foundation of openly available research results that can be applied in down-stream innovation and commercial development
- Contribute to reducing fragmentation in water research and innovation through international collaboration and knowledge sharing across stakeholders

For this 2026 Pilot on Open Sharing

All funded Bridge4Water projects are required to share results and data openly and in a timely manner. Dissemination may take place via the Bridge4Water platform, relevant databases, and open publication channels, including preprint archives and peer-reviewed journals.

All publications and presentations must acknowledge Bridge4Water support, including reference to the project's grant number, in accordance with the Bridge4Water Project Agreement and grant notification.

Projects are expected to upload data and results to openly accessible repositories. Bridge4Water will provide guidance to support compliance with open sharing requirements.

2. THE CALL – AT A GLANCE

The Bridge4Water call addresses fragmentation in the European water research and innovation landscape by fostering structured collaboration between academia and industry. The programme is aligned with the emerging EIT Water Innovation Mechanism under Action Programme 6 (AP6), structured around a key Strategic Objectives (SO4).

In the 2026 pilot, the call focuses on Strategic Objective 4: Water-smart and circular water management systems (SO4), enabling testing of the open innovation model and generating insights to support future implementation within EIT Water from 2027.

A key challenge is limited water efficiency, reuse, and resource recovery. Water scarcity already affects at least 41% of EU citizens and is expected to intensify. Despite this, less than 3% of treated wastewater is reused, and significant volumes of water and resources are lost. Advancing water circularity—through efficiency, reuse, and resource recovery—is therefore critical.

The call targets knowledge and solutions enabling more circular and efficient water systems, with emphasis on industrial systems and urban built environments, where innovation potential is high.

Industrial systems are typically optimised for reliability and compliance rather than circularity, making retrofitting complex and capital-intensive. Process-specific water quality requirements often conflict with reuse ambitions, creating trade-offs between recovery targets and operational stability. Regulatory uncertainty, lack of harmonised standards, and immature business models further limit adoption.

Urban water systems are generally centralised and designed for linear flows, restricting decentralised reuse and resource recovery. Transitioning to circular systems requires coordination across infrastructure, planning, governance, and citizens. Public acceptance, health concerns, regulatory fragmentation, and practical constraints such as stormwater variability and space limitations add further complexity.

Bridge4Water addresses these challenges by:

- Funding collaborative, high-risk research projects co-created by academia and industry
- Supporting interdisciplinary consortia across research institutions and industry
- Generating openly shared knowledge with strong potential for downstream innovation

2.1. Scientific scope

TRACK 1: Industrial Water Efficiency and Circularity

Projects under this track should contribute to advancing efficient and/or circular water solutions in industrial contexts, including manufacturing, processing industries, utilities, and industrial parks. Proposals may address any research topic within the overall theme of industrial water efficiency and circularity. The thematic areas listed below illustrate examples of relevant research directions but are not intended to be exhaustive or limiting, and proposals addressing other relevant challenges within the scope of industrial water circularity are also welcome.

1. Fit-for-Purpose Water Quality and Risk Frameworks
Advancing scientific and methodological approaches for defining fit-for-purpose water quality requirements across industrial applications. Topics may include risk assessment methodologies, monitoring and validation strategies, development of quality standards, and alignment between regulatory frameworks and industrial water reuse practices.

2. Advanced Separation and Resource Recovery
Fundamental and applied precompetitive research on selective separation mechanisms and technologies enabling the removal, concentration, and recovery of valuable or problematic constituents from industrial water streams. This may include development of novel materials, hybrid treatment systems, energy-efficient processes and utilisation of the water-energy nexus. Attention may be given to management, treatment, and valorisation of reject streams and concentrates generated in water reuse and reclamation systems.

3. Resilient, Flexible and Adaptive Industrial Water Systems
Research addressing the design and operation of industrial water systems capable of maintaining performance under variability in water quality, process conditions, and environmental pressures while ensuring security of supply. Topics may include modular treatment concepts, process control and back-up strategies, artificial intelligence, digital monitoring, and system modelling. Proposals may also examine how water efficiency or circularity strategies influence local water resources and receiving ecosystems, particularly in water-stressed regions.

4. Industrial–Utility Integration and Water Symbiosis
System-level research on the integration of industrial and municipal water systems to enable circular water flows and resource exchange. Relevant topics include cascading water use, shared infrastructures, governance models for cross-sector collaboration, and risk-sharing mechanisms between industrial and public actors.

5. Enabling Conditions for Industrial Circularity
Research addressing the non-technological dimensions that influence the adoption of efficient circular water practices in industry. This may include regulatory frameworks, standardisation approaches, circular business models, financing mechanisms, lifecycle and water footprint metrics, and organisational capacity development.

TRACK 2: Water Efficiency and Circularity in Urban Built Environments

Projects under this track should explore circular and efficient water solutions embedded in dense urban areas, neighborhoods, buildings, and public spaces. Proposals may address any research topic within the overall theme of water efficiency and circularity in urban built environments. The thematic areas listed below illustrate examples of relevant research directions but are not intended to be exhaustive or limiting, and proposals addressing other relevant challenges within the scope of water efficiency and circularity in urban built environments are also welcome.

1. Decentralised Water Reuse at Building or District Scale

Research on the design, performance, and integration of decentralised water reuse systems at building or district scale. Topics may include treatment technologies, public health and risk assessment, monitoring and validation methodologies, and integration into urban infrastructure systems.

2. Stormwater as a Resource in Urban Areas

Advancing scientific understanding and technological solutions for the capture, storage, treatment, and beneficial use of stormwater within urban environments. Topics may include hydrological modelling, multifunctional infrastructure, climate adaptation strategies, and distributed governance of stormwater systems.

3. Hybrid Nature-Based and Engineered Urban Systems

Investigation of integrated ecological and engineered approaches to circular urban water management. Relevant topics include nutrient cycling, ecosystem service assessment, biodiversity co-benefits, and the design and performance of hybrid blue–green infrastructure.

4. Digitalization and Smart Urban Water Management

Development of sensing technologies, data infrastructures, modelling frameworks, and decision-support systems that enable improved management of urban water systems. Topics may include digital twins, predictive analytics, artificial intelligence, interoperability standards, and user-centred interfaces.

5. Governance, Acceptance, and Transition Pathways

Research addressing institutional, regulatory, and societal dimensions of implementing circular and efficient water solutions in cities. Topics may include regulatory frameworks, planning integration, financing models, ownership structures, and public perception and acceptance of water reuse.

2.2. WHO CAN APPLY?

At a minimum, each project must include:

1. An eligible main applicant from one of these four Danish knowledge institutions, who are also Core Partners in EIT Water: Aalborg University, Aarhus University, University of Southern Denmark or VIA University College.
2. At least one industry partner actively engaged in the projects.

Additional collaboration partners from academia and industry are welcome and will be favourably assessed. We expect to see projects being submitted from consortia of between 2-4 partners.

For this 2026 pilot programme aligned to Strategic Objective 4, international consortia will be highly prioritised for funding, and we encourage international experts to form competitive consortia focussed on delivering impact, as per the EIT eligibility criteria for innovation projects.

2.3. FUNDING & PROJECT DURATION

Applicants may apply for one of the two tracks. Max duration and max budget are the same for Tracks 1 and 2.

Funding call 2026

Total budget available for funding*	Up to EUR 1,350,000
Budget per project	Up to EUR 270,000
Duration per project	Up to 16 months (latest end date 31 dec 2027)

* A maximum of 60% of the total budget available for funding can be allocated to each of the two tracks.

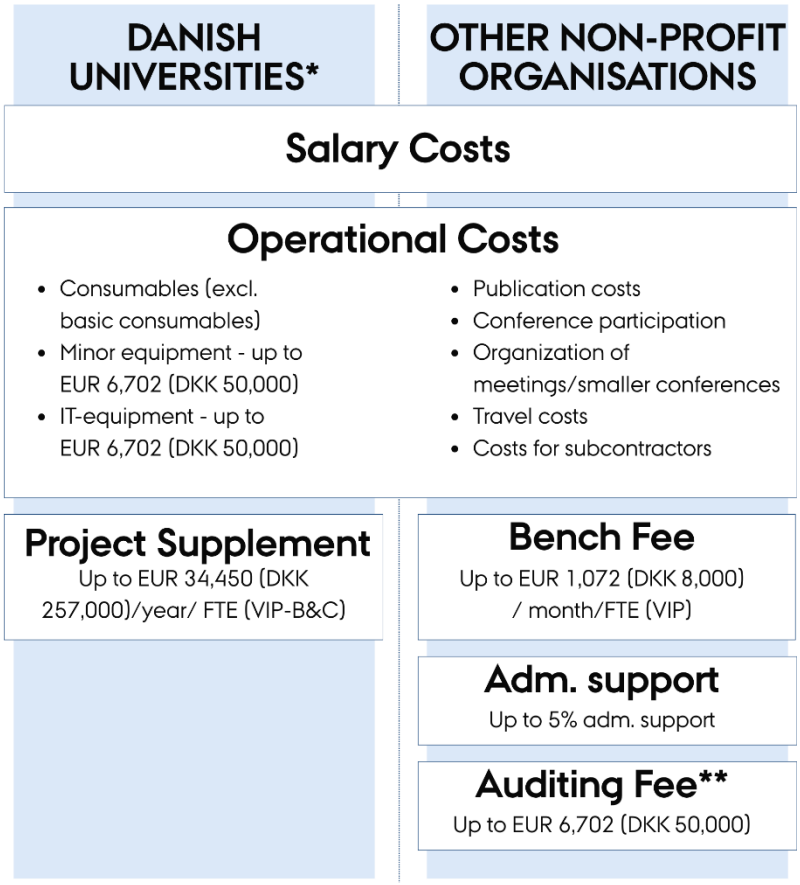
2.4. ELIGIBLE COSTS

The budget must only include costs directly attributable to the project and be in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles. The project must aim for cost-effective study designs where the proposed budget is proportionate to the scope, activities, deliverables, and potential impact of the project.

Flexible budget rules will allow all research / academic staff time to be included as eligible costs, enabling more direct cross-organizational collaboration. The organizations in the project can include parts of the time from already employed researchers and therefore do not need to wait to hire new staff before the project can be initiated.

Please refer to Appendix A for more details about eligible costs.

Applicants may apply for the following types of expenses directly related to the project:



* Universities included in Danish agreement on project supplements – plus VIA University College as partner university. Other universities not mentioned in this agreement are considered "Other Non-profit organisations".

**Only applicable for institutions not covered by the Danish Rigsrevision and only applicable for organisations with a budget above EUR 150,000.

PLEASE NOTE

- No funding can be allocated to for-profit company partners
- Bridge4Water will not cover salary or other costs that are already covered by existing funding
- Due to the short duration of projects, Bridge4Water will not cover salary for PhD students
- Flexible budget rules will allow tenured researchers to "buy out" time to cover their basic salaries in order to participate in projects, enabling more direct cross-organizational collaboration.

2.5. General Program Conditions

The research must be precompetitive and suitable for open collaboration

The data generated must be broadly useful beyond the immediate project team

All foreground results and data generated within the project must be shared openly, without IP protection or usage restrictions

If the project is funded, all partners must:

- Sign and adhere to the Bridge4Water non-negotiable Project Agreement
- Adhere to Bridge4Water's openness, reporting, participation and dissemination obligations, as listed in the grant decision letter

WHAT ARE PRE-COMPETITIVE PROJECTS?

The open projects funded under Bridge4Water must be of a precompetitive nature and have broad value creation for more than just the project participants. The results originating from the projects shall similarly be useable by others. Broadly speaking, precompetitive projects are characterized by and focus on:

- Challenges and problems that are relevant for groups of companies or the entire industry, for example by tackling market barriers, foundational gaps in knowledge, or developing common tools and methods.
- Creating open results and data that provides a generic knowledge foundation, which allows companies and others to use these for the later creation of new products and services through downstream innovation.
- The results of the project can be shared openly with the public without compromising the participating companies' ability to adapt the open results for specific, commercial, and protectable applications.

ADVICE FOR APPLICANTS

Ensure that the results of your project will be applicable to the relevant industry broadly and is solving a common challenge for all players in said industry.

Clearly identify in your application the timing of when the industrial partner will make commercial use of the results and ensure that this happens after the Bridge4Water project is finalized.

3. APPLICATION PROCESS

3.1. Mandatory steps (important deadlines)

The following steps are mandatory for all applicants to complete:

UPLOAD A PROJECT IDEA (by 1 June 2026, 23:59 CET)

If you have an idea for a research project within the Bridge4Water scope, you can showcase it on our community. As openness is a vital element in Bridge4Water, applicants must upload ideas before developing it into a full project application. Share your ideas on WorldLabs.

START A PROJECT APPLICATION

When you are set with a good idea and the right team to match it, you and your partners from industry and academia must collaborate to translate the idea into an Bridge4Water research project, where all project partners play an active role. We advise you to familiarize yourselves with the application templates. If in doubt, contact the Bridge4Water secretariat:

Bridge4Water Secretariat			
Title	**Name**	**E-mail**	**Phone**
Programme Manager	Martin Andersen	martin.andersen@au.dk man@watervalleydenmark.com	+45 2073 8080

CONTACT A LOCAL ADVISOR (by 16 June 2026)

The Bridge4Water secretariat and advisors are available to support you. These advisors, contact info provided below, are available at Aalborg University, Aarhus University, University of Southern Denmark and VIA University College and will assist potential applicants with identifying the precompetitive aspects of their ideas.

It is the responsibility of the main applicant to make sure that the proposed research and results are precompetitive and that the output can be shared openly without violating historical IP or e.g. licenses on bits of software codes.

The main applicant must contact one of the local advisors before 16 June 2026 to discuss the precompetitive nature of the project. Please share your idea post on WorldLabs when contacting an advisor.

Local advisors			
Institution	**Name**	**E-mail**	**Phone**
Aalborg University (AAU)	Anne Brokjær	anbr@adm.aau.dk	+45 91 37 31 77
VIA University College (VIA UC)	Rickard Lindquist	rl@via.dk	+45 87 55 44 03
University of Southern Denmark (SDU)	Bo Nilsson	nilsson@sdu.dk	+45 24 98 41 17
Aarhus University (AU)	Contact your local Business Developer: Department contacts		

SUBMIT YOUR APPLICATION (by 1 July 2026, 23:59 CET)

Submit your application to our online community, WorldLabs. For direct link to the application site, **click here.**

3.2. Ideation and matchmaking

JOIN WORLDLABS

As part of the 2026, pilot call, the Bridge4Water application process will take place using an online community hosted by WorldLabs. As from 2027, all EIT calls and initiatives will be coordinated by the EIT Water communication and partner platforms, but here and now, to be able to build momentum and match making we will use the WorldLabs platform as a tool to support this early initiative. On WorldLabs, you can create a profile for yourself, your research group, or your company, showcasing your interests and competencies. You can upload ideas for new projects, look for partners, give input to other ideas, and browse through our events. A profile makes it easier for potential partners to find you. You also apply for funding on our online community.

JOIN OUR EVENTS

This pilot Bridge4Water OIS call is supported by a series of information and ideation meetings. Join to learn about the aim and scope of Bridge4Water, terms for the specific call round, meet new potential partners, and get to know the details of the ideation and application process. All events are published on our WorldLabs community and on the Bridge4Water website as well through other channels.

FIND COLLABORATORS

Good connections between collaborators are essential. Join us at one of our events, where the Bridge4Water team facilitates sharing ideas and finding partners – perhaps even from non-obvious sources. Or reach out to potential partners on the WorldLabs marketplace.

REACH OUT IF YOU NEED HELP

Need more help finding the right idea, project or partner? Contact the Bridge4Water secretariat or one of the advisors located at Aalborg University, Aarhus University, University of Southern Denmark or Via University College who together can help you find the right partner or guide you to bring your competencies in play in the right project. Bridge4Water has a network of skilled players in industry and academia.

3.3. How to set your team

Bridge4Water projects must have participants from both academia and industry to be eligible. All projects must include at least one industry partner and one research institution partner. The parties co-create the project application and co-execute the research project, if granted.

Interdisciplinary and international collaborations are highly recommended.

We encourage all interested parties to participate in the matchmaking process by uploading ideas and resources on WorldLabs, reaching out to potential partners on WorldLabs and joining our events. By engaging in the matchmaking, you may broaden your professional network and find new and ideal partners to collaborate with.

Who can receive funding?	Only not-for-profit parties are eligible to receive funding from Bridge4Water.
Who can be main applicant?	The main applicant must be a permanently employed researcher from one of the following knowledge institutions: • Aalborg University (AAU) • Aarhus University (AU) • University of Southern Denmark (SDU) • VIA University College (VIA UC)
Who can be part of the project?	• Any interested company • Researchers from any universities/knowledge institutions (see below) • Non-profit organizations

ACADEMIC PARTNERS

The main applicant must be from AAU, AU, SDU or VIA UC, however, researchers from other universities or knowledge institutions can participate as co-applicants. In order for the researchers to be part of the application (with a share of the budget), the researchers' host institutions must accept and be able to comply with Bridge4Water's open approach to e.g. universal use-rights without restrictions to all IP generated in the project and that all data and results from the project must be published as soon as possible. All project participants must sign the non-negotiable Project Agreement if the project is awarded funding.

INDUSTRY PARTNERS

In Bridge4Water, companies and university researchers co-create and co-execute research projects based on needs, challenges, and ideas derived from the partners. The projects must address generic challenges that are shared by many companies – either within a certain link of the value chain or across links. Projects thus cannot focus on needs or challenges that are specific to a single company or where said company would be the main or sole beneficiary of the project's results.

In the 2026 pilot, companies are not asked to co-finance projects and can contribute with in-kind assets.

University researchers may not propose or participate as researchers in projects where they hold ownership or have another direct financial or organisational affiliation with a participating company partner.

SUBCONTRACTORS

Subcontractors are companies that are paid to perform a specific service for the project partners. They are not considered project partners themselves, and do not participate in internal sharing of project data/knowledge. The costs for subcontractors are only eligible insofar as the acquired competencies/services are not available from partnering universities and/or companies. The option to include subcontractors cannot be used to ensure financial support for company partners.

3.4. Project Agreement

The Bridge4Water Project Agreement is the same for all Bridge4Water projects. The Project Agreement has been pre-negotiated between a number of key research institutions and core industry partners and can therefore not be alternated. The agreement mirrors the project agreements that exists, and is already accepted, for other open innovation in science platforms such as ODIN, Plant2Food and IBIS OIS. The agreement regulates the terms and conditions between the parties in a funded project regarding openness to data and results, regulation of background and foreground knowledge, universal use-rights to all IP, confidentiality and liability. All funded projects must comply with The Danish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and the project agreement. The project agreement is available for download on WorldLabs under "Resources" and on the Bridge4Water website.

* Companies and other for-profit organisations cannot receive funding.

3.5. Administrative rejections

The Bridge4Water Secretariat reserve the right to administratively reject the application without peer-review if the application does not meet the requirements of the call guidelines.

3.6. Application material

Please familiarize yourself with the templates well ahead of the submission deadline, as the application process includes steps that require involvement from partners and/or support functions at all project partners. Templates can be downloaded on WorldLabs.

- [ ] **MAIN APPLICATION** — Template provided

  We recommend preparing the application in a document before filling out the application questions on WorldLabs.

- [ ] **CURRICULUM VITAE (CV)**

  From the main researchers/employees of each partner university/organization/company. Max. 1 page per person. Upload as one PDF.

- [ ] **LETTER OF SUPPORT** — Use template

  From each involved company confirming its involvement (and the nature thereof) in the precompetitive and open research activities in the project. Upload as PDF.

- [ ] **GANTT CHART** — Use template

  With work packages and activities for all participants. Upload as Excel and PDF

- [ ] **BUDGET** — Use template

  Must be approved and signed by the person who holds delegated authority. Upload as Excel and PDF.

- [ ] **BENCH FEE DOCUMENTATION - if relevant**

  Upload bench fee policy or documentation of bench fee calculation if relevant.

4. Review process

All applications must be submitted as full-length applications and will be reviewed in a one-step process. The reviewers will score the applications based on eight criteria (see below) using a 0-5 scale (0=fails to address criterion, 5=excellent). The applications will be reviewed by an International Review Panel selected from the group of EIT Water core partners.

INTERNATIONAL REVIEW PANEL

The International Review Panel consists of six specialists representing different scientific areas within Industrial and Urban Water Efficiency and Circularity. The panel reviews all the applications in full. The panelists' scores within the different call criteria are compiled into an objective and transparent ranking. The best projects within the total budget of Bridge4Water are granted based on the scoring.

4.1. Selection criteria

The selection criteria for funding calls in the Bridge4Water platform are listed below.

CRITERION	WHAT WILL THE REVIEWERS FOCUS ON?
1. Relevance to track scope	• Does the proposed project fall within the scopes of Industrial Water Efficiency and Circularity and/or Water Efficiency and Circularity in Urban Built Environments
2. Potential for downstream innovation	• Does the project address an unmet need? • Does it have potential for short-term innovation? • Does it have potential for long-term innovation? • Is it likely to deliver research results supporting product development, new services, process, industry standards, innovation or other value creation in the industry? • Will it open new innovation opportunities for the academic partner(s) (e.g. spin-outs, further research or innovation with commercial potential for the university)? • Engagement of industry and other relevant stakeholders • Does the project have sufficient and active industry engagement with intellectual, material, and/or infrastructural (access to equipment, facilities, data centers, etc.) contributions?
3. Scientific additionality/height	• Does the project offer novel scientific objectives and/or approaches to obtain the objective compared with state of the art? • Is the choice of scientific methodology and technological solutions sound? • Does the project have a competitive edge (scientific and technical level) compared with what can be achieved through adjacent technologies, services, organizational set-ups etc.?
4. Interdisciplinarity	• Does the project include both academic and industrial partners? • Does it include more knowledge institutions – and foster international collaboration in the water research environment? • Does the project include partners from different countries? • Does the project include industry partners from different sectors? • Does the project include relevant partners across scientific disciplines and industrial expertise?

5. Broadness in value creation	• Is the project (and/or the project output) relevant to/applicable to a broader range of companies/sectors than the project partners?
6. Implementa-tion	• Do the applicants have a viable plan for how to implement or further develop project output – e.g. in new follow-on research/demonstration projects, dialogue with new stakeholders etc.?
7. Openness	• Is the project pre-competitive? • Are there any factors in the project design that limit open sharing of output?
8. Budget	• Is the budget cost effective? • Is the budget proportionate to project aim, activities and expected output?

Please refer to Appendix B for more details about the evaluation criteria.