ENHANCE CALL

Guidelines

for Applicants

Financial Support for Third Parties

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1. Table of Contents

2. Introduction

The PoliRuralPlus project, under the Horizon Europe framework, extends an invitation to submit proposals that advance rural-urban interactions across the European Union. This guide facilitates applicants in crafting and submitting their proposals.

Within the PoliRuralPlus project, a series of four open calls is anticipated. These calls are designed to attract and fund innovative proposals that align with the project's overarching aims. The primary objective of these calls is to extend the impact of the PoliRuralPlus initiative in enhancing rural attractiveness, fostering rural-urban integration and leveraging technological innovations for sustainable rural development.

This document provides guidelines for applicants for the fourth open call, hereinafter referred to as the call or the Enhance Call.

2.1. Enhance Call Objective

The Enhance Call funds targeted validation projects that apply, test, and improve the **JackDaw AI chat agent**, the flagship tool of PoliRuralPlus. JackDaw enables stakeholders to interactively explore and analyse spatial data through natural language queries linked to maps. Through this call, selected projects will:

- **Apply JackDaw in real European contexts** such as policy-making, planning, research, or stakeholder engagement, demonstrating its ability to support evidence-based decisions via spatially contextualised conversations.
- **Provide structured validation feedback** on JackDaw's usability, reliability, and added value, helping shape the tool into a robust, user-friendly solution ready for wider adoption.
- **Empower stakeholders** (local authorities, SMEs, NGOs, citizens, researchers) to access and interpret territorial data in innovative ways, fostering inclusive participation in rural–urban development.
- **Contribute to capacity building** by training local actors in the use of AI-based map analysis and strengthening their digital skills.
- **Gain visibility and influence**, as funded projects will be showcased through the PoliRuralPlus platform, highlighting their role as pioneers in AI-driven territorial analysis.
- **Ensure sustainability and replicability** by documenting lessons learned and proposing pathways for JackDaw's use in other European regions.

The Enhance Call is thus designed not only to validate a new technology, but also to give applicants the opportunity to **co-create and shape the future of AI-supported decision-making in Europe**.

2.2. Quick Facts

- **Budget:** up to €25,000 per project (lump-sum)
- **Total projects funded:** ~ 7 - 15
- **Estimated implementation period:** February 2026 - July 2026
- **Applicants:** Only single legal entities are eligible to apply.

2.3. Expected Results

Projects funded under the Enhance Call are expected to deliver results that generate impact both for the applicants and for the PoliRuralPlus project:

- **Validated applications of JackDaw** in diverse European contexts, showing its potential for policy-making, planning, research, and stakeholder engagement.
- **Structured feedback** on usability, reliability, and impact of JackDaw, collected through the mandatory online form and final validation report.
- **Evidence of stakeholder engagement**, demonstrating how different groups (e.g. policymakers, SMEs, NGOs, citizens) interact with and benefit from JackDaw.
- **Recommendations for improvement**, identifying limitations, opportunities, and pathways for further development and adoption.
- **Contributions to sustainability and replicability**, through documented lessons learned and transferable examples of JackDaw use.
- **Capacity building and visibility for applicants**, strengthening their skills in AI-supported analysis, enhancing their reputation as innovators, and expanding their networks across Europe.

3. Eligibility Criteria

In order to ensure the integrity and impact of the PoliRuralPlus project, applicants must meet the following criteria:

1. **Type of entity:** Any type of legal entity (e.g. SME, NGO, public authority, research organisation, self-employed natural persons) can apply, provided they have the operational and financial capacity to carry out the proposed activities.
2. **Single applicants only:** Consortia or joint submissions are not permitted for this call. Each application must be submitted by one legal entity
3. **Eligible countries:** Applicants must be legally established in an EU Member State or an Associated Country as outlined by the Horizon Europe rules.
4. **Third parties:** Subcontracting or transfer of financial contribution to third parties is not permitted.
5. **One proposal per applicant:** Only one proposal will be accepted for funding per applicant. In case of multiple submissions, only the last one received (based on system timestamp) will be evaluated, with all others declared ineligible.
6. **Non-beneficiary clause:** Organisations that are current PoliRuralPlus beneficiaries or their affiliated entities are not eligible to apply.

7. **Declaration of honour:** Applicants must declare their eligibility and absence of conflict of interest in the online application form.
8. **Language:** English is the official language of the PoliRuralPlus open calls. Submissions and deliverables in other languages will not be evaluated. Supporting documents must also be in English, except for the document proving the legal status of the organisation.
9. **GDPR compliance:** Any project involving personal data must comply with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) to ensure privacy and protection.
10. **Deliverable obligations:** Applicants commit to produce obligatory deliverables as outlined in Chapter 6.
11. **Proposal page limit:** The total length of Part B (Technical Description) must not exceed 8 pages, including the cover page. Excess pages will be disregarded during evaluation.

4. JackDaw GeoAI Chatbot

The Enhance Call is dedicated to testing and validating **JackDaw**, the flagship technological tool developed within PoliRuralPlus.

JackDaw GeoAI Chatbot

https://www.poliruralplus.eu/services/

JackDaw is an AI-powered chat agent designed for spatially contextualised conversations. It addresses challenges in rural and urban development where traditional language models struggle with location-specific queries.

Users interact with JackDaw by selecting a location on a map and submitting a natural language query. The system analyses the query, determines necessary spatial and temporal parameters, and retrieves relevant data from available sources. The enriched spatial context is then integrated into AI-generated responses, which may be presented as text, tables, charts, maps, or dashboards.

JackDaw combines natural language processing with geospatial intelligence, enabling smarter, data-informed decision-making for regional development, policy analysis, and stakeholder engagement.

Under this call, applicants are expected to:

- Apply JackDaw in real-world contexts across Europe,
- Collect structured user feedback on its functionality and usability,
- Demonstrate its added value for decision-making and communication.

Other PoliRuralPlus tools are not in scope for this call.

5. Submission Process

Proposal submissions are solely via the online form on the PoliRuralPlus Knowledge Hub available at https://www.poliruralplus.eu/open-calls/.

Upon submission, applicants will receive an on-screen confirmation, ensuring that their proposal has been successfully received.

The proposal contains two parts:

- **Part A: Administrative Form** - This section is designed to collect essential information about your entity and designated contacts for technical and contractual matters. Please provide accurate and complete details to facilitate smooth communication throughout the application and project implementation process.

  Note: During the application and contracting process, applicants will be required to submit documentation verifying the legal status of their organisation as well as beneficial ownership information, in accordance with EU regulations and financial transparency requirements.

- **Part B: Technical Description** - Part B is the narrative part of the proposal and must be uploaded as a single PDF document using the provided template. It includes three sections corresponding to the evaluation criteria:
  - **Objectives** – Describe the context in which JackDaw will be validated, the expected use case(s), and how these align with the Enhance Call objectives.
  - **Impacts** – Outline the expected results, benefits for stakeholders, and how feedback will contribute to improving JackDaw and its adoption across Europe.
  - **Implementation** – Provide a realistic work plan, timeline, and budget allocation, including the expertise of the team involved.

  The total length of Part B must not exceed **8 pages, including the cover page**. Any content beyond this limit will be disregarded during the evaluation process.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit their proposals well before the deadline. If errors are identified in a submitted application, and provided the deadline has not passed, applicants may resubmit. In such cases, only the last version submitted (system timestamp) will be considered eligible.

6. Obligatory Deliverables

Selected applicants will be required to provide the following deliverables as part of their contractual obligations. These outputs will serve to validate JackDaw in practice, capture user feedback, and ensure visibility of results.

1. **Dissemination outputs**
   - At least **2 blog posts** for the PoliRuralPlus platform, reporting on project progress and experiences with JackDaw.

- ○ At least **2 social media posts**, highlighting milestones and results.
- ○ At least **1 news article** on an institutional or external website to ensure outreach to wider communities.

  All outputs must acknowledge PoliRuralPlus funding and comply with GDPR.

2. **Validation feedback**
   - ○ Structured feedback on JackDaw must be submitted via the **online form provided by the PoliRuralPlus consortium**.
   - ○ This feedback will cover usability, functionality, relevance for stakeholders, and **the extent to which JackDaw supported decision-making and communication**.
   - ○ Applicants are also required to collect and report participation data disaggregated by gender and other relevant diversity indicators.

3. **Final validation report**
   - ○ A comprehensive report (10–15 pages) summarising the full validation exercise, including:
     - ■ User journey insights, lessons learned on usability, and clear evidence of decision-making or communication support.
     - ■ Description of the use case(s) where JackDaw was applied.
     - ■ Stakeholder groups involved and feedback collected.
     - ■ Key findings on usability, reliability, and added value.
     - ■ Identified barriers and recommendations for improvement.
     - ■ Evidence of dissemination and outreach activities.
   - ○ The report will be made public, with sensitive information excluded to ensure compliance with confidentiality requirements.

7. Proposal Evaluation

For evaluating proposals submitted under the Enhance Call, a transparent and fair evaluation framework will be applied. Proposals will be assessed based on their alignment with the objectives of the call, expected impacts, and quality of implementation. The evaluation procedure follows the approach used in Horizon Europe, using a scoring scale from 0 to 5, where 5 represents the highest level of excellence.

7.1. Evaluation Criteria

Objectives (0-5 points)
- Clarity of the proposed **validation use case(s) and activities** for JackDaw.
- Relevance of the chosen validation context to the objectives of the Enhance Call.
- Innovative or original aspects of how JackDaw will be applied and tested in practice.

Impacts (0-5 points)
- Quality and significance of expected validation feedback for improving JackDaw.
- Extent and diversity of stakeholder engagement (e.g. policymakers, SMEs, NGOs, citizens).
- Potential for replicability or transferability of results to other European contexts.

Implementation (0-5 points)

- Coherence and realism of the proposed **validation activities**, including timeline and milestones.
- Soundness and justification of the proposed budget.
- Competence and relevant experience of the applicant.

7.2. Proposal Scoring

- Evaluators provide a score in the range 0–5 for each criterion, using steps of 0.5.
- **Thresholds:** Proposals must achieve a minimum score of **3** in each criterion and at least **11 points overall** to be considered for funding.
- Interpretation of scores:
  - **0** - The proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information.
  - **1 - Poor.** The criterion is inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.
  - **2 - Fair.** The proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses.
  - **3 - Good.** The proposal addresses the criterion well, but a number of shortcomings are present.
  - **4 - Very Good.** The proposal addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present.
  - **5 - Excellent.** The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.
- Definitions for score descriptors:
  - A '**minor shortcoming**' is an issue that relates only to a marginal aspect of the proposal with respect to the criterion and/or can easily be rectified (it will not impact the scoring).
  - A '**shortcoming**' is a problem that relates to an important aspect of the proposal. It impacts the scoring but does not render the proposal inappropriate for funding, i.e. the proposal is still expected to lead to useful results with positive impact.
  - A '**significant weakness**' means that the proposal addresses the criterion in a limited and/or not sufficiently effective way (will lower the score below the threshold). This can also be the case when the proposal includes a large number of shortcomings, each one of them not rendering the proposal inappropriate for funding, though all together make the proposal not address the criterion sufficiently in an effective way.

7.3. Evaluation and Selection Process

- Each proposal will undergo an **eligibility check** (see Chapter 3).
- In case of a **high number of applications**, the PoliRuralPlus consortium may apply an **AI-based pre-screening tool** to support the evaluation process. The pre-screening will focus on clustering, relevance to the call objectives, and completeness of proposals.
- All proposals will ultimately be assessed by a panel of independent experts. The AI pre-screening, if applied, will only serve as an initial filter and will always be followed by manual evaluation by two independent evaluators.
- Each proposal will be evaluated based on three main criteria: **Objectives, Impacts and Implementation**, with a scoring range from 0 (lowest) to 5 (highest) for each criterion.

- Scores and comments from individual evaluations will be consolidated in a panel review to ensure consistency and fairness.
- A **final ranking list** will be produced.
- In case of proposals with equal overall scores, priority will be given to those demonstrating stronger impacts, in particular, clearer evidence of validation outcomes and broader stakeholder engagement.

8. Financial Support

8.1. Origin of the Funds

Selected beneficiaries will sign a dedicated contract for provisioning of financing with the PoliRuralPlus project coordinator (CVUT). A model contract for provisioning of financing is part of the open call documents. The funds attached to the contract for provisioning of financing come directly from the funds of the European Project PoliRuralPlus, and the PoliRuralPlus coordinator is managing the funds according to the Grant Agreement No 101136910 signed with the European Commission.

8.2. Use of the Financial Contribution

Each beneficiary commits to a proper use of the funding received, for the purposes of carrying out the sub-project in compliance with the defined work plan and expected deliverables and planned budget. While no financial reporting will be requested within the experiment, the beneficiary must ensure that funds are properly spent and in accordance with the project Grant Agreement. See the model contract for provisioning of financing for further details.

8.3. Funding Principle

- Successful applicants will receive financial support of up to **€25,000 per project**, provided as a **lump sum contribution**.
- It is expected that approx. **7–15 projects** will be funded under this call.
- Proposals requesting amounts above €25,000 will be considered ineligible.
- The **maximum cumulative support per single legal entity across all PoliRuralPlus open calls remains €60,000**. Applicants who have already reached this ceiling are not eligible for further funding.
- Subcontracting or transfer of financial contribution to third parties is not permitted.

8.4. Payment Schedule

The financial support will be disbursed in two instalments:

- **Prepayment (upon contract signature):** 30% of the lump sum.
- **Final payment (after acceptance of the deliverables):** 70% of the lump sum.

9. Key Dates

- **Call opening:** 30 September 2025
- **Submission deadline:** 1 December 2025, 17:00 CET
- **Expected notification of results:** January 2026
- **Signature of Contract for provisioning of financing:** January 2026
- **Expected implementation period:** 6 months, February - July 2026

10. Processing of Personal Data

10.1. Processing of Personal Data by the PoliRuralPlus Coordinator

The personal data provided by the Applicants in the Enhance call will be controlled by the PoliRuralPlus coordinator (Czech Technical University in Prague) and processed by Plan4all z.s., one of the PoliRuralPlus partners. The collected data will be handled according to the GDPR. Personal data will be processed exclusively for the purposes of performing, managing and monitoring the application or protecting the financial interests of the EU (including checks, reviews, audits and investigations). Personal data may be disclosed only to the external evaluators who evaluate their proposals and to the European Commission. The personal data will be kept for as long as it is necessary to process the application and its participation in the PoliRuralPlus project.

10.2. Processing of Personal Data by the Funded Sub-Projects

The selected sub-projects must put in place appropriate technical and organisational security measures to address data processing risks, and in particular:
- prevent any unauthorised person from accessing computer systems that process personal data;
- ensure that access to personal data is limited to persons with special access rights;
- ensure that, during communication of personal data and transport of storage media, the data cannot be read, copied or deleted without authorisation;
- design its organisational structure in a way that meets data protection requirements;
- ensure that all photographic documentation, screenshots, etc., associated with the sub-project implementation comply with GDPR regulations, as they may be published to the public.

11. Updates, Assistance and Consultancy

For additional support, including guidance on preparing proposals, applicants are encouraged to contact the PoliRuralPlus coordination team via the official project website: https://www.poliruralplus.eu/open-calls/.

Please note: PoliRuralPlus reserves the right to make updates to the open call documentation at any time before the submission deadline. Any such updates will be communicated exclusively through the official website.

12. Conclusion

Your participation in the PoliRuralPlus Enhance Call contributes to the final stage of the project's mission to strengthen rural–urban interactions across Europe. By validating JackDaw, applicants will play a direct role in shaping a flagship tool designed to support smarter, data-informed, and participatory decision-making.

As the **last open call** under PoliRuralPlus, Enhance marks the closing opportunity for stakeholders to engage directly with the project through financial support. We look forward to innovative validation activities that will provide valuable feedback, confirm JackDaw's usability, and ensure its lasting impact for European regions.