

ASEAN Science, Technology and Innovation Fund (ASTIF)
Call 2026 — Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)
“ASEAN Grand Challenge: AI-Enabled Competitive and Resilient Region”

A. General, Theme and Scope

Q1. What is the ASTIF Call 2026 about?

A. The Call adopts a Grand Challenge approach under the theme “ASEAN Grand Challenge: AI-Enabled Competitive and Resilient Region.” It aims to mobilise multi-country partnerships to develop and apply AI-enabled solutions that contribute to ASEAN’s priorities of resilience, competitiveness, and inclusive digital transformation, in line with the first year of implementation of APASTI 2026–2035.

Q2. What is a “Grand Challenge” approach, and how does it differ from a regular project call?

A. A Grand Challenge frames the Call around ambitious, cross-cutting regional problems rather than narrow, single-topic project topics. Proposals are expected to define a clearly-articulated regional problem, demonstrate relevance across multiple AMS, and pursue high-impact, scalable AI-enabled solutions with pathways to adoption, commercialisation, or policy uptake. It emphasises collaboration and shared regional benefit over standalone national activities.

Q3. What priority areas can a proposal address?

A. Proposals must fall under one of four priority categories:

- Category 1: AI for Health, Bioeconomy and Food Security;
- Category 2: AI for Space, Earth, Ocean and Climate Intelligence;
- Category 3: AI for Advanced Materials and Energy Transition;
- Category 4: AI for MSME Productivity and Workforce Development.

Proposals should clearly define the regional problem being addressed and demonstrate its relevance across multiple AMS.

B. Tracks and Modality

Q4. What are the two tracks under this Call?

A. The Call is structured into two tracks:

- Open Competitive Call Track – open to any entity (higher education institutions, public research organisations, government agencies, non-profit organisations, private sector companies, start-ups, and other legally registered organisations) based in an AMS engaged in STI activities; and
- COSTI Sub-Committee Track – open to entities serving as national focal points (i.e. COSTI Sub-Committees Focal Persons), with proposals endorsed by the respective Sub-Committee.

Q5. Is the COSTI Sub-Committee Track a one-time arrangement or a recurring modality?

A. The Sub-Committee Track is offered as part of the initial implementation phase of APASTI 2026–2035 to encourage synergy among the five newly restructured COSTI Sub-Committees. Whether it continues as a recurring modality in future ASTIF Calls will be reviewed by COSTI based on the experience of this Call.

Q6. Under the Sub-Committee Track, what does “endorsement” refer to?

A. Under the Sub-Committee Track, the endorsement refers to the Sub-Committee’s endorsement of the proposal itself which follows the Sub-Committee’s normal endorsement process:

- (1) The proponent prepares a full proposal using the ASTIF Call proposal template;
- (2) The proponent submits that proposal to the ASEAN Secretariat for Sub-Committee endorsement;
- (3) Once the proposal has been endorsed by the Sub-Committee, it will be submitted to the National COSTI Focal Point for submission under the Sub-Committee Track.

National Focal Points (NFPs) and proponents under this track are encouraged to begin this process early so that the endorsement is obtained well before the 16 October 2026 submission deadline.

C. Eligibility of Applicants

Q7. Who is eligible to apply? Must the applicant be a government agency?

A. No. Applicants are not required to be government bodies. Eligible entities include higher education institutions, public research organisations, government agencies, non-profit organisations, private sector companies, start-ups, and other legally registered organisations engaged in science, technology and innovation activities in AMS.

Q8. Do applicant institutions need to be a legally registered entity in AMS?

A. Yes. Applicant institutions or organisations must be legally registered in their respective ASEAN Member State. A valid certificate of registration or equivalent legal document is among the mandatory supporting requirements at proposal submission (for the Open Competitive Call Track).

Q9. What does “certificate of registration or equivalent legal document” refer to (Open Competitive Call Track)?

A. It refers to the official document proving that an entity legally exists and is registered in its home AMS. The exact document varies by country and entity type. Common examples:

- Government agencies: the law, decree, or mandate establishing the agency.
 - Universities / public research institutions: establishing charter, enabling law or decree, gazette notice, or accreditation document.
 - Companies / private sector / start-ups: certificate of incorporation or business registration certificate.
 - Non-profit / civil-society organisations: association, foundation, or NGO registration certificate.
- Where the original document is not in English, a certified English translation should be provided.

If no such document exists in a particular AMS, the COSTI focal point may advise the applicant to submit the document that is normally required in that country when applying for research funding to verify the legal existence of the applicant's organisation.

Q10. Do the documents in Section 5 (ii) and (iii) in the Call Announcement apply only to the lead institution, or to partner institutions as well?

A. They apply to both. In a multi-country team, each participating institution, the lead proponent and every partner institution, including partner institution from Dialogue Partners must provide:

- **The institutional letter under Section 5 (ii)** — a formal letter from the institution, signed by its authorised representative (e.g., Head of Institution or a duly delegated officer), confirming that the proposal is submitted on behalf of the institution; and
- **The certificate of registration under Section 5 (iii)** — a valid certificate of registration or equivalent legal document confirming the institution's legal status in its respective ASEAN Member State (see Q9 for what qualifies as an equivalent document).

The lead proponent compiles these documents from all participating institutions and submits them together as a single package through the National COSTI Focal Point. Where any original document is not in English, a certified English translation should be provided.

Q11. Is a multi-country team required? Can a single country apply alone?

A. A multi-country team is mandatory. Project teams must comprise at least two ASEAN Member States. The Call further encourages teams involving more than two AMS, and teams that combine members from CLMV-TL and non-CLMV-TL as co-leads, but not mandatory.

Q12. How are partnerships between institutions in different AMS formed? Will the ASEAN Secretariat match partners?

A. Interested institutions are expected to identify and establish partnerships through their own professional, academic, research, and innovation networks. The ASEAN Secretariat may support dissemination and awareness of the Call but will not serve as a matchmaking body for project consortia.

Q13. If two institutions in different AMS wish to collaborate, who submits the proposal and how?

A. The lead institution/proponent shall submit the proposal through its respective National COSTI Focal Point, in accordance with Section 8 *How to Submit* in the Call for Research Project Proposals announcement.

Q14. Can Dialogue Partners participate, and in what forms?

A. Yes. AMS are encouraged to collaborate with Dialogue Partners. Dialogue Partners may participate through co-funding arrangements, technical expertise, infrastructure sharing, capacity-building support, data contributions, or other forms of collaboration, subject to applicable ASEAN rules and procedures. However, Dialogue Partners are not eligible to receive funding from this Fund.

D. Eligible Activities and Project Design**Q15. What types of activities are eligible?**

A. Eligible activities include: (a) collaborative research or development of models or AI-enabled tools/solutions; (b) technology demonstration or proof-of-concept of AI solutions; and (c) development or enhancement of shared infrastructure and data systems for AI R&D.

Q16. Can capacity-building activities (training, workshops, exchanges) be funded?

A. Yes, but not as standalone components. Capacity-building activities may be proposed only where they are integrated into eligible activities (a), (b), or (c) as indicated in Q14.

Q17. What is the maximum project duration?

A. Proposed activities must have a maximum project duration of 24 months. The indicative implementation period runs 1 April 2027 – 31 March 2029. A project may commence or conclude outside this timeframe subject to PAG approval.

Q18. Does the Call support proposals of different scales?

A. Yes. To promote inclusive participation, the Call will support proposals of varying scales, including large-scale regional initiatives, medium-scale multi-AMS pilot projects, and small seed grants under the COSTI Sub-Committee Track.

E. Budget and Funding**Q19. What is the total budget for the Call?**

A. The total budget for the Call is USD 1,200,000, for all approved projects to be supported by the ASTIF under the 2026 funding cycle. This is the total envelope for the entire ASEAN-wide Call.

There is no fixed budget cap for each project proposal, but requested budgets must be limited to eligible expenditure categories (see Section 6 of the ASTIF 2026 Announcement: Call Guidelines).

The Project Proposal Template which includes the Detailed Budget Breakdown and Indicative Work Plan can be downloaded here. ([link to DOCX](#))

Q20. Is co-funding required?

A. Co-funding is not a strict requirement, but proposing entities are strongly encouraged to secure co-funding or in-kind contributions from participating AMS and/or Dialogue Partners to enhance project impact, ownership, and long-term sustainability.

Q21. Can the budget cover overheads?

A. Personnel costs, such as service fees and allowances for professional staff engaged in the approved project, are allowed, but must not exceed 30% of the total project budget (as indicated in the Eligible Expenditures section). However, overhead costs for project administrative staff (i.e., costs to support existing R&D personnel) are not allowed.

Q22. Is there a cap on the Contingency Fund?

A. The ASTIF Call 2026 does not impose a fixed percentage cap on the Contingency Fund. As a general reference, past ASTIF guidance has typically limited contingency requests to around 10% of the combined Programme and Activity Costs and Operational Costs subtotal. Regardless of amount, any request to utilise the contingency fund must be justified and consulted on in advance, and may only be used for expenditures arising from unexpected events.

Q23. Can Dialogue Partners receive ASTIF funding directly?

A. No. Only ASEAN-based institutions may receive and administer ASTIF funds. Dialogue Partners may still participate in and add value to a project through co-funding, in-kind support, technical expertise, infrastructure or data sharing, or capacity-building support, but ASTIF funds themselves must be received and managed by an ASEAN-based lead or participating institution.

F. Submission, Evaluation and Timeline

Q24. How are proposals submitted, and to whom?

A. For Open Competitive Call Track, proposals are submitted through the National COSTI Focal Point (NFP) of the AMS that is home to the project lead. NFPs forward proposals to the ASEAN Secretariat (ASEC). ASEC in turn conveys the proposals to the Project Appraisal Group (PAG) for evaluation. National Focal Points must ensure their submissions reach ASEC by the 16 October 2026 deadline.

For COSTI Sub-Committee Track, proposals are submitted to the ASEAN Secretariat for endorsement by the relevant Sub-Committee. Once endorsed, the proposal shall be submitted to the NFP and proceed through the same process as the Open Competitive Call Track. Proposals should therefore be submitted to the ASEAN Secretariat sufficiently in advance of the 16 October 2026 deadline to allow time for the endorsement process.

Q25. Where can I download the Proposal Template and its Annexes (Budget Template, Work Plan)?

A. These documents are available for download at the ASTIF webpage astnet.asean.org/astif/.

Q26. Who evaluates the proposals?

A. A Project Appraisal Group (PAG), comprising representatives from AMS and experts in relevant fields, evaluates and selects proposals. To manage conflicts of interest, PAG members shall not evaluate proposals submitted by entities of their home countries.

Q27. On what criteria are proposals assessed?

A. Proposals are assessed on: relevance to the Call theme, categories and APASTI objectives; a clearly defined regional problem; regional collaboration and impact; technical and financial

soundness; clear contributions of AMS and/or partners; clear deliverables; sustainability; and the degree of cross-sectoral and cross-Sub-Committee collaboration.

Q28. Can you summarise the key dates and deadlines for this Call?

A.

Activity	Timeline
Proposal submission to National Focal Points (Proposals under the COSTI Sub-Committee Track must first be submitted to the ASEAN Secretariat for Sub-Committee endorsement during this period (allow 1–3 weeks). Once endorsed, they shall be submitted to the relevant National Focal Point.)	1 August – 16 October 2026
Evaluation and selection by the Project Appraisal Group	1 November 2026 – 31 January 2027
Announcement of selected projects on astnet.asean.org/astif/	15 February 2027
Agreement signing	1 – 31 March 2027
Project implementation period	1 April 2027 – 31 March 2029
Mid-term review	1 April 2028
Final reporting and dissemination	31 March 2029

G. Support for Applicants

Q29. Where can National Focal Points and applicants find the Call materials?

A. The Call, Concept Note, and related materials are disseminated via ASTNET (<https://astnet.asean.org/astif/>) and communicated to National Focal Points by the ASEAN Secretariat. Focal Points are encouraged to circulate the materials through their national networks.