

SME-Track Call

Small and Medium sized Enterprises call

Big Science Business Forum 2026

Maastricht, January 2025

Hosts of the BSBF2026 Maastricht

Call for ILOs to propose companies to participate in the BSBF2026 SME-Track

The fourth edition of the Big Science Business Forum (BSBF2026) will take place in Maastricht, The Netherlands, from the 27th to the 30th of October 2026 and is organised by the Netherlands and Belgium. The BSBF is a business-oriented congress that brings the main European research infrastructures together with European industry to present and discuss the future developments, investments, and procurement opportunities of the Big Science market.

According to the 2024/2025 Annual Report on European SMEs, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) represent 99% of all businesses in the EU. They are often referred to as the backbone of the European economy, providing a potential source for jobs and economic growth. Over the past years, there has been a general growth trend across all size classes. SMEs are also anticipated to improve their performance in knowledge-intensive industries. However, they may face challenges in achieving significant growth in high-technology industries, which are critical for competitiveness and innovation. Involvement with the Big Science market can provide a path to innovation and increased competitiveness.

SMEs are often well suited for the Big Science market. Experience shows that SMEs exhibit excellent flexibility to respond and adapt to highly specific and challenging technical requirements of Big Science organisations for the procurement of advanced technological parts and systems. These procurements usually entail development and manufacturing of a low volume but particularly innovative parts in a given technology field that might align perfectly with the SME's growth strategy based on involvement in highly complex projects. Examples of this can be found across the Big Science market in different European SMEs.

Unfortunately, SMEs also face difficulties when engaging in business with Big Science organisations. The latter's risk management policies and financial requirements often exclude technically capable SMEs from contracting directly with Big Science organisations. Access to funds, which is reported as one of the main barriers for the growth of European SMEs, also is a key issue. And finally, the amount of business development manpower that is necessary to pursue opportunities in the Big Science market is not always available for SMEs, in particular for small companies.

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Aligned with the global purpose of the Big Science Business Forum of strengthening collaborations between research organisations and industry, we organise an SME-Track with a twofold objective:

Category A

We invite SMEs who have been successful in the Big Science market to present their success stories as a way to convey the message to the Big Science ecosystem, national authorities and European Commission to share how their involvement in the Big Science market has made a positive impact on their company. This to make a case for how investing in the Big Science market is a means of growth for European SMEs, and can generate knowledge transferable to other market segments, such as medical & biomedical technologies, safety, industry 4.0, aerospace, etc.

Category B

We invite SMEs with no prior connection with the Big Science market, but who have proprietary technology and/or capabilities that they deem possibly applicable for the Big Science market to apply for the opportunity to liaise with technical responsible personnel from Big Science organisations to explore collaborations and business opportunities. These SMEs would benefit from a privileged position to maximise their participation in BSBF2026.

Introduction to Big Science Business Forum 2026

BSBF2026 represents the most important opportunity for European companies and other stakeholders to learn about the future many billions that will be spent over the period 2026-2030. Following the success of the previous editions held in Copenhagen, Granada and Trieste, the Forum will offer companies the opportunity to:

- Learn about business opportunities across a wide range of technology areas.
- Meet representatives from Europe's Big Science Organisations (BSOs) and their key suppliers.
- Showcase their expertise and potential for the Big Science market by participating in the open exhibition area.
- Gain insights into procurement rules, intellectual property rights (IPR), opportunities for SMEs and how companies can interact with the Big Science market.

In conclusion, the perfect occasion to determine whether a relation with certain organisations and projects can provide viable innovation and business opportunities that align with the company's strategy.

More than 1,000 participants are expected, the majority from European businesses and Big Science Organisations that want to work together to develop the Big Science common market. Delegates are expected to include CEOs, Heads of R&D and Procurement departments, Business Developers, and officers involved in sales and collaborations between research infrastructures and high-tech industry.

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BSBF2026 is hosted by the Dutch Ministries of Economic Affairs and Education & Science together with BELSPO and the Belgian and Dutch networks of industrial liaison officers AGORIA and BigScience.NL with the support of the Dutch province of Limburg and various other stakeholders.

The business forum is organised in partnership with the following European Big Science Organisations: European Organisation for Nuclear Research (CERN), European Space Agency (ESA), European Southern Observatory (ESO), The European Synchrotron Radiation Facility (ESRF), European Spallation Source (ESS), Facility for Antiproton and Ion Research in Europe (FAIR), European X-Ray Free-Electron Laser (European XFEL), Fusion for Energy (F4E), Institut Laue-Langevin (ILL) and Square Kilometre Array Organisation (SKAO).

BSBF2026 will consist of:

- Plenary sessions with involvement from the Big Science Organisations mentioned above.
- Parallel sessions focusing on Big Science investments in the coming years: opportunities within the main technology areas.
- An Artificial Intelligence & Machine Learning track that will fill one of the parallel sessions.
- An SME-Track poster session, enabling European small and medium sized enterprises to be highlighted as key interlocutors for business opportunities with European Big Science organisations in the coming years.
- A Women in Big Science (WBSBF) programme with lunch (pre-registration), a poster session and a plenary award session.
- 1:1 meetings (B2B and B2C) to enable Big Science Organisations, prime contractors, and subcontractors to meet each other.
- A single exhibition space to allow participants to showcase their products and services alongside Europe's largest Big Science infrastructures.

For more information, please visit the BSBF2026 [website](#).

PERIIA

The PERIIA Network is the Pan-European Research Infrastructure ILO Association. The members of the PERIIA Network have given the board the mandate to do preparatory work to establish a legal statute of the future association. While working for this overall aim, the board will also follow the 2-year work programme defined at the General Assembly hosted in Trieste in October 2024. The main objectives of PERIIA are to:

- Be a key intermediary between the European supplier business/industry and big science-organisations for matters related to procurement, innovation and tech-transfer opportunities.
- Enhance the big science-organisations' interaction with business/industry in order to create an integrated and sustainable big science-market.
- Raise awareness and improve access for business/industry (particularly SMEs) entering and acting on the big science-market.
- Provide a forum for the exchange of best practices on how to work as an ILO.
- Enhance the cohesion and functioning of ILO networks at relevant Big Science organisations.
- Act as a consultative reference body for other European/International stakeholders.

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PERIIA is supporting the organisation of BSBF2026, being in charge of this SME-Track, the selection of BSBF 2026 moderators, and the call focusing on Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning, a new topic for the BSBF2026.

See more information on [PERIIA Website](#).

SMEs selection and evaluation criteria

For this track, a limited number of SMEs will be selected, to ensure high visibility for those selected. The majority (60 to 40) of the places will be reserved for the SMEs who are new to the Big Science market to optimise the chance for new technologies finding their way to Big Science organisations.

After receiving the expressions of interest, the Board of PERIIA will coordinate the selection and propose a final list for the SME-Track to the IOC committee including the submitted forms for all selected SMEs. Each selected SME must be identified as Category A or B with the corresponding template. The final selection should ensure an adequate balance between countries, Big Science technologies and SME size (in the spirit of giving a chance to participate to recently launched startups, although impaired by their size and financial capabilities). The Board of PERIIA will also ensure that the defined ratio between Category A and B SMEs is met.

Countries with ILOs belonging to different organisations should name one ILO to act as interface with PERIIA.

Selection will be based on the following criteria:

1. Category A SMEs:
 - a. Experience with contracts for Big Science organisations and national research facilities (e.g. the number of contracts and for which organisations)
 - b. Big Science public or private-funded R&D projects (national funding, Eureka, Horizon Europe, etc.)
 - c. Development of the SME: annual turnover, employment, growth, etc.
 - d. Quality certifications
2. Category B SMEs:
 - a. Proprietary technologies which are currently commercialised in other markets and are deemed promising for the Big Science market.
 - b. Business development strategy for the Big Science market (efforts already made to enter the market via presence in past Big Science industrial events, etc. and submitted tenders, which were not yet successful)
 - c. Public or private-funded R&D projects which are potentially transferable to the Big Science market (national funding, Eureka, Horizon Europe, etc.)
 - d. Development of the SME: annual turnover, employment, growth, etc.
 - e. Quality certifications

Priority will be given to those SMEs that were not selected for participating as speakers in the previous edition of BSBF.

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Timeline

1. 21 January 2026: BSBF2026 & PERIIA launch the SME-call
2. March 31 2026: deadline for submission by the EU ILOs, who can nominate a maximum of 4 candidates per country.
3. April – May 2026: the PERIIA Board will evaluate and inform the IOC
4. June 2026: the IOC will approve the final list of participating SMEs in the SME-Track
5. June 2026: PERIIA will inform all the ILOs and the selected SMEs will be informed by their corresponding ILOs

How does the SME-track work

Selected SMEs will be formally invited by the IOC to take part in the SME-Track. These SMEs will be entitled to:

- Enjoy the free opportunity to display your poster in the SME poster area during all the BSBF2026 duration. This area will be selected to ensure maximum visibility to maximise business opportunities for participating SMEs. Posters must be provided by the SMEs by their own means, A0 size, in paper or cardboard.
- Participation in poster session during which drinks will be served.
- Registration to the congress for one delegate at a preferential rate.
- Presence on BSBF2026 conference webpage, conference programme book and other media-related conference material.

Expressions of interest

Expressions of interest shall consist of the submission of **Annex I: SME-Track template CATEGORY A/B** depending on the interest of the SME. All the Expressions of interest should be signed.

SMEs interested should contact their national Big Science ILOs and forward them their Expression of interest.

PERIIA will request all European ILOs to nominate a limited number of SMEs in their country (4 SMEs) (a certain coordination would be necessary in countries where ILOs belong to different organisations), providing information on the selected SMEs using the template included in Annex II.

ILOs should send the final list of their 4 national SMEs selected jointly with their Expressions of interest (Annex I or Annex II) by email with the subject line “SME-Track – Application BSBF2026” to anabelen.delcerro@cdti.es with a copy to calls4tracks@bsbf2026.org before 1 April 2026

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Annex I: template for SMEs Category A

Company name:
Address:
Country:
Website:
Contact person:
Position:
Phone:
Email:
Size: see annex III

	2023	2024	2025
Turnover [M€]			
Balance sheet total [M€]			
Number of employees			

Company activities and competences (maximum 300 words)

Quality certifications, nuclear qualifications (ASME, CEFRI, IAEA, ISO, RCC-MR, etc.):

Contracts/subcontracts awarded by large scientific facilities and national big science organisations (maximum 200 words, most recently first)

Please use the following format:

[Big Science Acronym], [year], [name of contract]; short description

Public or private R&D projects for the Big Science market (H2020, Horizon Europe, Eureka, INTERREG, national funding, etc.): (maximum 200 words, most recently first)

Please use the following format:

[Programme], [year], [project name]; short description of project and task assigned

Date:

Signature:

(The above signatory is responsible of the veracity of the provided information)

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Annex II: template for SMEs Category B

Company name:
Address:
Country:
Website:
Contact person:
Position:
Phone:
Email:
Size: see annex III

	2023	2024	2025
Turnover [M€]			
Balance sheet total [M€]			
Number of employees			

Company activities and competences (maximum 300 words)

Technologies and capabilities commercialised in other markets potentially transferable to the Big Science market (maximum 300 words)

Quality certifications, nuclear qualifications (ASME, CEFRI, IAEA, ISO, RCC-MR, etc.):

Public or private R&D projects for other markets than the Big Science market (H2020, Horizon Europe, Eureka, INTERREG, national funding, etc.): (maximum 200 words, most recently first)

Please use the following format:

[Programme], [year], [project name]; short description of project and task assigned

Business development strategy for the Big Science market (maximum 300 words; consider number of tenders submitted, participation in industrial events, etc.)

Date:

Signature:

(The above signatory is responsible of the veracity of the provided information)

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Annex III: SME definition

The main factors determining whether an enterprise is an SME are:

1. Staff headcount
2. Either turnover or balance sheet total

Company category	Staff headcount	Turnover [M€]	Balance sheet total [M€]
Medium-sized	< 250	≤ 50	≤ 43
Small	< 50	≤ 10	≤ 10
Micro	< 10	≤ 2	≤ 2

These ceilings apply to the figures for individual firms only. A firm that is part of a larger group may need to include staff headcount/turnover/balance sheet data from that group too.