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Abbreviations

AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission
AUDA-NEPAD	African Union Development Agency
CC	Country Coordinator
CfP	Call for Proposal
ESR	Evaluation Summary Report
EU	European Union
FAQs	Frequently Asked Questions
FMT	Fund Management Team
FW3	Funding Window III
GCDC	Grant & Sub-delegation Committee
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IEP	Innovation Expert Panel
IA	Implementation Agreement
IC	Investment Committee
IPR	Intellectual Property Rights
KEUR	Thousand Euros
KfW	German Development Bank (<i>Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau</i>)
LMIS	Labour Market Information Systems
MEUR	Million Euro
NDA	Non-Disclosure Agreement
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SIFA	Skills Initiative for Africa
SIFA FC	SIFA Financial Cooperation
OCEO	Office of the Chief Executive Officer
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training

01. About This Guide

This SIFA FW3 Guide for Applicants describes how to prepare a proposal for the SIFA FW3 Call for Proposals 1/2022. It contains the instructions and templates as well as background information required for the preparation and submission of a proposal. It indicates the types of actions required to respond to the Call for Proposals (SIFA FW3/CfP/1/2022) and explains the expected Themes supported by the Call. Next, it provides information on the funding opportunities available and on the eligibility criteria in terms of country of origin and the Partnership setup. It then sets out the evaluation and selection criteria and procedures. The guide concludes with an indicative timetable and description of support services available to applicants and refers to software tools (SmartME electronic platform) for the preparation of a proposal. The annexes contain a glossary of SIFA FW3-related terms and document templates useful for the preparation of a proposal.

Together with the SIFA FW3/1/2022 CfP text and forthcoming application template available to be filled on the SIFA website (www.skillsafrica.org), it constitutes the full Information Package for the SIFA FW3/CfP/1/2022 Call for Proposals. These documents comprise all the information applicants need to prepare the proposal.

The SIFA FW3/CfP/1/2022 is published in the national daily newspapers of all SIFA partner countries, on the SIFA Programme website and on SIFA National Coordinator Organisations websites (in English/French language). The official languages for the Call, the proposal and other documentation related to SIFA FW3 are English and French.

This guide is subject to revisions by AUDA/NEPAD. Applicants and subsequent grantees are informed of any revisions, and the latest version is always available on the SIFA FW3 website (www.skillsafrica.org). In case of any uncertainty regarding the contents of the guide, clarifications and further guidance will be given by the AUDA/NEPAD SIFA FW3 Secretariat upon request through the contact form of the SIFA FC website (www.skillsafrica.org) or the SmartME contact form.

Note

Successful applicants are advised that this guide is complemented by SIFA FW3/CfP/1/2022 Guide for Project Implementation, which will advise grantees on how to manage their projects and administer the related grants in accordance with the project. In addition to the persons directly involved in project implementation, these guidelines also target administration staff responsible for finance, communication, and project support. The SIFA FW3 Implementation Agreement - signed between the Grantee and Contracting Authority - with its annexes will specify the (non-negotiable) terms and conditions each partnership is expected to accept if their proposal is selected for funding.

02. Introduction to SIFA and SIFA Funding Window III

The SIFA Funding Window III (FW3) is implemented under the Skills Initiative for Africa (SIFA) Financing Cooperation (FC) which is a pan-African initiative set up in 2016 by the African Union Commission (AUC) and co-funded by the German Government and the European Union (EU) with support from national governments in eight SIFA partner countries: Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Togo and Tunisia. The overall objective of SIFA is to strengthen the occupational prospects of young people in Africa. During its pilot phase (2016-2025), the Programme finances skills development projects expected to contribute to employment-oriented skills development for young people in African countries.

As a Programme, SIFA is committed to achieving results in four different areas:

Result I: Selected institutions have been capacitated to provide employment-oriented skills development.

Result II: Access to employment-oriented skills development for young people is improved, in particular for women, students from low-income groups, refugees and migrants.

Result III: Private sector contributes to improving skills development by participating in the design and delivery of employment-oriented skills development programmes.

Result IV: Lessons learned and best practices are disseminated at the national, regional and continental levels.

The main instrument of SIFA for implementation is grant funding provided for sustainable and innovative activities, applied from three different funding windows:

Window 1: Large skills development investment projects (grant funding up to 3 M EUR)

Window 2: Skills development investment projects (grant funding up to 1.5 M EUR); and

Window 3: Innovative skills development projects (grant funding up to 400 K EUR).

2.1. SIFA Funding Window III (FW3)

While having a different thematic focus from the two other funding windows, FW3 continues to build on previous achievements by other funding windows launched earlier. Now launched, FW3 is bringing into partnership the eight governments to focus more on innovation in skills development as a basis for a transition to higher productivity and job promotion.

More specifically, FW3 is designed to support innovative skills development approaches in Technical

and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) through grants awarded for specific activities implemented in the form of projects¹ seeking to validate the feasibility of TVET innovations in the market. As such, the SIFA FW3 grants are targeted to activities seeking to pilot, demonstrate and replicate new or improved concepts and prototypes before rolling them out to the market as products, services or processes. Alternatively, the innovation proposed for FW3 funding can be based on an already existing, well-functioning product/ service/process. Hence, the focus of activities is on market validation and user testing of the proposed innovation.

SIFA grants are targeted at activities implemented in the form of projects focused on market validation and user testing of the proposed innovation. FW3 intends to attract high-quality and multi-dimensional projects, with particular emphasis on innovativeness, defined as new or improved products, services, processes or business models related to TVET. Under FW3, innovation is not about doing more of the same type of products, services or processes nor necessarily inventing something that is “all new to the world.” **Innovation is about finding different or improved or new access to ways of making skills more accessible, relevant, and recognised for employability.**

FW3 projects are expected to seek proof-of-concept for new or improved products, processes, services, or business models in the field of TVET and are needed by the labour market. Alternatively, the innovation proposed for FW3 funding can be based on an already existing, well-functioning product/service/process. Still, a grant is sought to replicate the success in a new market and/or another country. For early-stage projects, the product/service/process model should at least exist as a concept or prototype ready to be validated in a real-life environment with users (proof-of-concept). Information on the proposed concept must be available. If the project entails a mature service seeking validation in new markets, the intended market(s) should be in one of the SIFA partner countries.

The recipients of FW3 grants are envisaged to be professional TVET organisations backed by the involvement of the private sector and/or employers and organisations supporting entrepreneurship, enterprises, and entrepreneurial skills, such as business incubators.

The total budget of the SIFA FW3 is 9.5 million Euro (M EUR) for the years 2022-2025. This is to be disbursed as grants allocated on a competitive basis with Calls for Proposals (CfPs) organised four times during the programme duration (2022-2025). All Calls are scheduled to open in 2022-2023.

The SIFA FW3 proposal process is a single-stage process: interested applicants submit a proposal for evaluation. After the eligibility check, due diligence screening and technical evaluation, a selection of shortlisted projects will be submitted to the AUDA-NEPAD Investment Committee (IC) which validates the recommendations from evaluators; after which the AUDA-NEPAD Grants and Sub-delegation Committee (GSDC), reviews the award & process compliance, followed by a ‘no objection’ from KfW. Upon receipt of the GSDC recommendation, the OCEO of AUDA-NEPAD will approve the final list of projects to be funded. After the approval of the shortlist, the Implementation Agreement

¹ Project is a temporary activity in that it has a set beginning and end in time, and therefore has a clearly outlined scope and set of resources. A project is unique in that it is not a routine operation, but a specific set of operations designed to accomplish a singular goal. See e.g., Project Management Institute (PMI): <https://www.pmi.org/>

(IA) negotiations will commence between the Lead Partner representing the Partnership behind the project proposal and the AUDA-NEPAD and SIFA FMT Team. During the negotiations, the project proposal will be discussed and finalised in the form of a detailed, budgeted work plan. Once the work plan is ready, the IA is ready to be signed, after which the project can commence.

The contracting authority for SIFA FW3 is AUDA-NEPAD, which works in close cooperation with the SIFA FC Fund Management Team, a service provided by NIRAS² in implementing the FW3 Fund. AUDA-NEPAD is the key partner in administering the FW3 grants provided for projects. AUDA-NEPAD is also responsible for the disbursement of tranches of the grant to the projects as per milestones agreed in the work plan. While implementing the FW3 projects with the grant provided, grantees are expected to follow the AUDA-NEPAD rules and guidelines on financial management.

² <https://www.niras.com/about-niras/>.

03. SIFA FW3 Call for Proposals

3.1. Innovation and SIFA FW3

This Guide for Applicants is about SIFA FW3 Innovative skills development projects, supported by the grant funding programme implemented in 2022-2025 through four CfPs. The proposed activities supported by grant funding are to be presented in the form of projects expected to contribute to the SIFA objectives of supporting innovative skills development approaches in TVET. Overall, the projects selected for funding should give impetus to innovation in skills development as a basis for a transition to higher productivity, employment and job promotion.

For SIFA FW3, Innovation is defined as a new or improved product, service, process, or business model in the field of TVET needed and taken up by the labour market. It is about finding different or improved or new access to ways of making skills more accessible, relevant, and recognised for employability. Innovation can be (but does not necessarily have to be) something that is “all new to the world.” It can also be incremental in the sense of improving an already existing process, system, or device by adding a new component to it. Innovation is not, however, about doing more of the same type of products, services or processes.

The projects receiving funding under one of the three thematic areas could thus be:

- **Products & Services A:** provision of new or improved TVET services, courses for skills competencies, and qualifications in demand by the labour market but not yet offered by existing TVET providers.
- **Product & Services B:** provision of new or improved TVET services and courses to actors, such as students, content developers, companies, and governments who previously had no access to such courses and services.
- **Teaching and Learning Processes:** implementation of new or improved teaching and learning approaches and methodologies, including devices and tools.
- **Organisational Practices:** activities that support TVET institutions to develop and strengthen partnerships and stakeholder engagement, particularly with labour market partners, to promote new approaches and collaborations in training provision and financing.

3.2. SIFA FW3 Type of Projects Expected

SIFA FW3 grants are targeted to projects focused on market validation and user testing of the proposed innovative concept and/or prototype. Alternatively, the innovation proposed for FW3 funding can be based on an already existing, well-functioning product/service/process sought to be replicated in a new market and/or another SIFA country.

For early-stage projects, the product/service/process model should at least exist as a concept or prototype and be ready to be validated in a real-life environment with users (proof-of-concept). If the project entails a mature service seeking validation in new markets, the intended market(s) should be in one of the SIFA partner countries.³

Note: SIFA FW3 grant awarding authority (AUDA/NEPAD) does not take any equity on either the products/services/concepts or the organisations supported.

More specifically, the FW3 projects are expected to have a well-defined goal and target beneficiaries with skill needs on demand (documented) in the target labour market. Furthermore, the projects proposed for funding should be action-oriented and tasked to achieve the set goal(s) with a work plan clearly explaining the outcome, outputs, resources and finances required.

Proposed projects need to be at the following stages of development:

- **Proof of concept:** piloting a concept that targets beneficiaries in a specific country/market context to gain an early, real-world assessment of the technical and financial viability of the proposed innovation.
- **Testing impact and delivery:** testing a proven concept for social impact, improved outcomes and/or market viability, as well as operational refinement to build paths to sustainability and scale.
- **Scaling-up:** adaptation of an evaluated existing innovation to new contexts or geographical areas within any of the eight SIFA partner countries.

FW3 funding is targeted for the implementation of the proposed innovation, and hence it will not support the following:

- projects that exclusively focus on research
- projects that exclusively focus on market surveys
- projects that exclusively focus on policy development
- projects that exclusively focus on capacity building or training
- projects that exclusively focus on building infrastructure

³ SIFA pilot countries are: Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Togo and Tunisia.

Ideally, the project proposed for FW3 funding would be an integral part of the activities of the organisations submitting the proposal. A successful FW3 proposal would demonstrate the potential or recently identified needs in the user population and emphasise the validation of the assumed provision of a new or improved product/service/process or business model to the market and not the development of a completely new technology or an idea. The emphasis should be on validating the new or improved product/service/process model to the market. As such, FW3 projects can seek to verify the positioning and value of the proposed innovation amongst clients and validate the assumptions on how the innovation will be technically delivered to the users and what kind of resources are needed to sustain it on the market.

The proposals are expected to contain a full description of the proposed project, including the project phase(s), the nature of the proposed work at each project phase, the benefits that will be accrued at each phase, the project partnership and their roles and an estimate of the total investment required to complete the project as a whole. It should clearly describe the validation strategy backed with a complete and realistic work plan.

The FW3 proposal should therefore include the following components:

- Describe the proposed solution and its technical features, and describe what is innovative in the proposed solution.
- Describe whether the proposed solution has been used and tested in the market (provision of evidence is required if this is the case).
- Identify who owns and/or is planning to own the solution, and identify the target market, beneficiary or region.
- Identify who will deliver the solution to the market after the validation is over (and how).
- Identify how and where the solution is to be pilot tested/validated over the implementation period (three to five months).
- Describe how the validation process is to be conducted, including but not limited to (i) how the proposed solution is to be delivered for user testing, (ii) how the user feedback is collected, (iii) what types of (personnel, financial, technical, etc.) resources are needed, (iv) what are the roles and tasks of the different persons/organisations in the project Partnership, and (v) how proposed resources are allocated per organisation/task to support the validation.
- Briefly explain the anticipated revenue model for the eventual take-up of the solution or how the solution is envisaged to be financed if the beneficiaries are not expected to pay for the solution.

3.3. SIFA FW3 Project Structure

The purpose of the market validation project is to clarify the innovation owner's thinking about future market deployment and set out a business case to secure the first internal or external financing. The technical and financial feasibility of an innovation pilot with the SIFA FW3 grant is established via the pilot project, demonstrating and validating the precise conditions to be fulfilled for the deployment. The end result is a deployment plan explaining how the innovation will be delivered to the market based on an understanding of user/customer needs and resources required. Part of the validation is to get noticed and to raise awareness – in terms of both content and attractiveness of presentation. To convince new partners and investors or public decision-makers, the deployment plan based on the validation must be formulated from their viewpoint.

The duration of the SIFA FW3 market validation project is up to 18 months and focused on demonstration, user feedback and peer reviews, including (but not limited to) the following components:

- Demonstration/pilot of the service involving a significant number of users in real-life conditions (validation with users in real-life conditions will ideally include two to three iterations).
- Feedback documented from the identified users/consumers, including the description of any specific barriers to overcome prior to initial rollout.
- Peer review of the service, including dissemination activities. Peer reviews can be arranged in the form of a series of workshops/seminars/discussion groups.
- Drafting of a market validation report, incorporating the results of the peer review and user feedback and outlining the actions as well as barriers and challenges to overcome in the future rollout.
- A final report documenting the findings of the project, including a business/investment plan as part of the reporting.

The SIFA FW3 market validation project is proposed to be divided into three phases (excluding Preparatory Phase). For example, the project effort and resources could be distributed as First Payment (15%), Market Analysis & Pilot Setup (ballpark 30-40%), Market Validation (ballpark 30-40%), and Evaluation & Closing (15%), as indicated in Table 1 below. The First Payment (15%) and the last payment (Evaluation & Closing 15%) are fixed, while the two payments in between (Market Analysis & Pilot Setup and Market Validation) are to be decided by the grantee project work plan. Each phase has a pre-defined duration and end, culminating in the achievement of a milestone marked by key deliverables (output) such as the Market Validation Report.

Table 1: SIFA FW3 Market Validation Project Implementing Schedule

Time	M0	M1-M5	M6-M15	M16-M18
Type of Work	Preparation	Market Analysis & Pilot setup	Market Validation	Evaluation & Closing
Effort & Resources	15%	30% (example - to be decided by the project)	40% (example - to be decided by the project)	15%

Disbursements from the SIFA FW3 funds administrated by AUDA-NEPAD to the projects will be made in tranches (see Table 2), for which the amounts are defined as a certain percentage of the total grant. The tranches will be paid against the presentation and documentation of achieving specific outputs and documented by the expected outcome of such outputs as agreed per each SIFA FW3 market validation project work plan. Combined, the outcome/expected outcome and output(s) are defined as a result.

Table 2: SIFA FW3 Market Validation Project Disbursement Schedule

Time	M0	M1-M5	M6-M15	M16-M18
Disbursement per Tranche	T0 15%	T1 30% (example - to be decided by the project)	T2 40% (example - to be decided by the project)	T3 15%
Indicator (Key Output)	Project Work Plan & Signed IA	Market Research Study & Market Validation Plan	Market Validation Report	Final Report, incl. business plan & project audit report

The projects report their progress to SIFA FMT according to the progress made in achieving the outputs. Thus, evidence of the achievement of the agreed output and documentation of the associated outcome indicator triggers the corresponding disbursement. The disbursement schedule will be stipulated in the IA between the project grantee and AUDA-NEPAD. Notably, the First Payment is provided after the signing of the contract, and the work plan is approved and will be deducted from the costs of the project by the time of the final payment.

3.4. SIFA FW3 Call Specific Themes

Interested applicants are invited to respond to the SIFA FW3 Call for Proposals 1/2022 by submitting a proposal for funding under one of the themes described below.

Theme 1: Digital Tools & Skills

Context: With restrictions in movement and requirements for social distancing, access to training/skilling etc., has been limited in many geographies. This theme seeks to promote innovative ideas to ensure the continuous delivery of training in a time of COVID-19 and similar disruptive crises. It builds on accelerating digitalisation and subsequent demands of the Future of Work where access to skilling does not depend on physical boundaries or attending costly accommodation or travel.

Objective: Enhanced delivery of TVET via digital technologies and applications to enhance employability in the post COVID-19 era.

Target Applicants: The grant recipients (applicants) will be publicly accredited and/or legally registered formal entities. Academia and research organisations with a track record of improving the design, implementation and evaluation of innovative TVET activities are encouraged to apply.

Project Examples: Proposed projects may include but are not limited to the following topics: mobile and online training, digital training applications, multimedia learning platforms, audio and video learning toolkits, digital learning applications, virtual labs and simulation devices, home-schooling lesson applications, as well as the orientation of existing or development of new content for teachers on how to adapt to the digital learning environment. Blended learning, moving classrooms online to reduce physical presence in training facilities and costs of training and digital skills training for a digitalised economy are also proposed projects.

Theme 2: Female Entrepreneurship and Employability

Context: COVID-19 has had an effect on society on all fronts, in particular on women and youth. This theme seeks to promote the take-up of innovative solutions to support female entrepreneurs and/or to promote the skilling of women and youth to increase their resilience in a time of prolonged COVID.

Objective: Enhanced employability and enterprise creation amongst women, youth, and vulnerable groups in TVET.

Target Applicants: TVET champions but also innovation support organisations (incubators, accelerators, hubs, labs, and tech transfer offices) that host early-stage enterprises such as start-ups and growth companies (in existence for approximately three years) on their premises and provide them with technical, financial or other support. Cross-border cooperation at the intermediary level is encouraged to learn and exchange good practices. Likewise, proposals from networks are welcomed.

Project Examples: Proposed projects may include (but are limited to) empowering these disadvantaged groups, training along production supply chains using applications and digital tools, and developing new or improved products, services, and processes to support such training. Innovative solutions to skills development for youth in collaboration with organisations supporting the incubation of early-stage ventures are encouraged. Proposed projects may include adding technical skills training

to regular incubation training, coaching and mentoring, and assistance on business promotion and administration such as company registration and market access. Finally, this may include the up-skilling of tutors and management in gender-responsive pedagogy in TVET institutions.

Theme 3: Training Innovation in Informal Sectors

Context: COVID-19 has taken a heavy toll on disadvantaged women and youth, including skills training for refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDP), as well as workers in the informal economy of many countries. This Call seeks to provide opportunities to enhance the basic skilling and livelihoods of these groups. Enhanced connectivity and new technology, such as inexpensive mobile phones and the use of social media, are radically altering citizens' behaviour everywhere. This paradigm shift provides an opportunity for even the most resource-constrained institutions, including public authorities, to invest in low-cost development of innovative, technology-enabled products and services, upgrading the delivery of TVET in the informal sector. It is also an opportunity for TVET organisations to consider how to advance the creation of quality, affordable, accessible, and sustainable solutions in and for socially and/or economically challenged communities.

Objective: Innovate TVET to deliver training and skills in informal sectors and vulnerable groups.

Target Applicants: TVET organisations are in a good position to promote the adoption of open approaches for the delivery of services to and with communities where learners are still excluded due to gender and/or economic or social reasons. Partnerships could include TVET organisations joining resources with innovation support organisations (incubators, research/ academia, and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)) that host and/or train social entrepreneurs or entrepreneurs with social goals to design innovations that have a positive impact on excluded communities in the markets.

Project Examples: Proposed projects may include (but not be limited to) retraining traditional craftsmen along the production supply chains through applications and other online tools, innovative ways of doing apprenticeships and internships, e.g., flipped classrooms and training for a transition from informal to formal sector qualifications and certification. The projects can generate, package and deliver knowledge in this field through outputs such as tools, methodologies, or programmes that can be further used by the organisations working with disadvantaged groups. Projects could also help beneficiaries to cope with technological advances, identify new business opportunities for them amongst communities and fosters a better relationship between municipal governments, learners and TVET organisations at large.

3.5. SIFA FW3 Grant and Project Implementation

SIFA FW3 funding is available to organisations from the public and private sectors and civil society. Applicants must be enterprises, public bodies or non-profit organisations, i.e., they must be so-called legal persons.

NB: Individual persons are not eligible to apply for a SIFA FW3 grant.

Due to the FW3 emphasis on cross-border collaboration, replication of good practice and exchange of knowledge within and across ecosystems is encouraged. Proposals can arrive from a combination or a group of organisations formed to undertake the implementation of the proposed project in more than one SIFA partner country. The scale of projects supported may very well normally exceed the resources of any one member of such groups, and hence the FW3 grant is applied.

To SIFA FW3, such group undertakings are defined as the Project Partnership, which comprises an association of two or more entities (companies, organisations or public authorities) with the objective of participating in a common activity and/or pooling their resources to achieve a common goal through a project supported by the FW3 grant. The Project Coordinator (Lead Partner) leads the Partnership and has the responsibility to keep all parties informed of the progress and undertakings throughout the application process. Prior to any commitment to submit a proposal to the SIFA FW3 CfPs, the Partnership must discuss, decide, identify, and commit to their respective roles in the project; they should realistically estimate resources such as personnel and finance and define a realistic ‘business’ target that addresses a real need. Once consensus has been reached on these matters, the proposal is drafted and circulated to all partners until a final version is agreed on. All partners must be equally committed to the submission of an application and to the participation in the project. The Lead Partner will submit the proposal on behalf of the Partnership.

3.5.1. Cross-Border Collaboration in a SIFA FW3 Proposal

SIFA FW3 encourages Partnerships to include in their proposals mechanisms that connect organisations to each other across borders to exchange practical knowledge and solutions on what works, where and why. Knowledge exchange – or peer-to-peer learning – should be anchored in the context of identified development priorities of the Project Partnership. The Partnerships should work within themselves to identify relevant and transferrable knowledge as well as the target beneficiaries with agreed practical goals that the planned knowledge exchange may support. Partnerships should also identify and select the right instruments (workshop, twinning, exchange, competitions, etc.) to be used for different purposes. For example, as a part of the Market Validation Project, the Partnerships can organise study tours to different countries or markets that expose participants to new ways of doing things and offer opportunities to share knowledge. This may help in recognising new opportunities, building networks, and applying these in different contexts as part of the validation or subsequent deployment of innovation.

The Partnership applying for a grant from the SIFA FW3 must consist of at least two independent legal entities from a minimum of one SIFA participating country, of which only one can act as a signatory to the IA. The organisation signatory to the agreement must be a legal, registered entity in one of the eight SIFA partner countries. The organisation signatory to the IA is the organisation with the sole legal responsibility for the implementation of the project and administering of the SIFA FW3 grant as per the IA and its annexes. The organisation signatory to the IA with the SIFA FW3 contracting authority is called the “Grantee” and “Lead Partner”. The Grantee is the entity responsible

for the coordination of the project and, therefore, also acts as the “Project Coordinator.” Therefore, the Lead Partner must also nominate a designated individual to act as “Project Coordinator.” The representative of the organisation’s signatory to the IA can be a different person than the one nominated to serve as a Project Coordinator. However, the signing representative and the individual acting as Project Coordinator must be employed in the signatory organisation.

The same signatory organisation can submit different proposals to the SIFA FW3 Themes as long as the nature of the proposed project is different and the Project Coordinator is not the same individual. However, only one project per call from the same signatory organisation can be selected for financing.

3.5.2. Project Partnership

A FW3 Project Partnership can accommodate legal entities from other SIFA participating countries as well as entities coming from countries outside as long as they are not operating as signatory organisations and Lead Partner. Other legal entities belonging to a Project Partnership cannot act as “Grantee” or “Lead Partner”, nor can the “Lead Partner” represent any legal entities other than the “Grantee”/ “Lead Partner”. The Grantee must always be a legal entity from a SIFA partner country. Partnerships must have the expertise and resources (personnel, equipment, finance) necessary to successfully carry out the proposed project(s), and these should be convincingly integrated to form a coherent action. All the participants must have the financial means to carry their co-financing share of the project and have an adequate number of staff to implement the project. It is essential to have adequate and skilled project management resources available (e.g., Project Coordinator). The participants in the Partnership must be committed to the tasks assigned to them, and there must be sufficient expertise between participants to ensure that all tasks can be properly executed.

For each Project Partnership that applies for FW3, funding should fulfil the following minimum requirements:

1. It must consist of at least two impartial, registered legal entities from one SIFA partner country (Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Togo and Tunisia). One must be the Lead Partner.
2. The Project Lead Partner (Grantee) must be a registered legal entity from a SIFA partner country.
3. Project activities are to be implemented in a minimum of one SIFA partner country.
4. Participation from outside a SIFA partner country: SIFA FW3 allows the participation of entities from countries outside of the eight SIFA partner countries in projects where such participation is of mutual interest and ensures the interoperability of products, services and applications.

3.5.3. Roles of Project Partnership Members

The **Project Partnership** is expected to play different roles and has different responsibilities in implementing the project activities and is thus compensated differently, according to inputs provided. The roles of the participants in a SIFA FW3 Project Partnership are defined in the following categories:

1. **The Project Lead Partner (Grantee)** is a legal entity registered in a SIFA partner country. The Project Lead Partner manages, administers, and coordinates the implementation of all activities and ensures timely reporting on both project progress and the use of financial resources.
2. **Project Members** are legal, registered entities that agree with the Project Lead Partner to participate in the implementation of a specific part of the project and derive benefits from it. A Project Member is part of the Project Partnership. Project Members can come from a SIFA partner country or from outside of them.
3. **A Sub-Contractor** is an individual or organisation that is procured only to provide services or products to the Project Partnership not available from the Project Lead Partner or a Project Member. A Sub-Contractor is not part of the Project Partnership and is contracted for a limited time and scale based on specific skills/ needs identified by the Project Lead Partner only. The Project Partnership maintains openness and transparency in securing goods and services for the completion of projects. The overall amount of work allocated to one Sub-Contractor cannot exceed 10% of the overall value of a SIFA FW3 grant.
4. **Support partners** are organisations that have a mutual interest in their shared products, services or applications and can also form partnerships with the Partnership. Support partners are, for example, entities that support the Project Partnership, such as other funding entities that are not part of the Project Partnership. They can come from outside the SIFA participating country but are not eligible to receive any SIFA FW3 grant funding.

3.5.4. Partnership Agreements

Partnership agreements should be concluded between the participants for the completion of the work. The Partnership agreements may not infringe on the obligations set out in the SIFA FW3 IA. Partnership agreements normally cover the participation in the project and define, as far as possible, the exploitation of the results arising from the project. Partnership agreements can be particularly useful in projects involving many participants. While the SIFA FMT/AUDA-NEPAD team must be informed of said agreements, they are not subject to the SIFA FMT/AUDA-NEPAD's approval.

Partnership agreements and letters of co-operation between partners and agreements dealing with Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), confidentiality and non-disclosure agreements (NDA) must be signed by all Project Members, indicating their key roles, responsibilities and rewards and the dissolution of the Partnership or continuation at the end of the project duration. Copies of these agreements are to be provided with the application. These agreements indicate all involved parties'

key roles, responsibilities, rewards, and the dissolution of the partnership or its continuation at the end of the project.

Note: The form of these agreements may differ from institution to institution, and therefore, there is no standard template.

3.6. Funding Principles

3.6.1. Cost Models for SIFA FW3 Call Themes

Theme 1: Digital Tools and Skills

The amount requested should not be more than EUR 400,000 and not less than EUR 300,000, inclusive of Value Added Tax (VAT). The grant amount should not exceed 90% of the total project cost, and the total matching (counterpart) funding should equal 10% of the total cost. The full matching funding can be provided as an in-kind contribution.

The duration of the grant and the supported project is expected to be between 12 – 18 months from the date the agreement is signed.

Theme 2: Female Entrepreneurship and Employability

The amount requested should not be more than EUR 400,000 and not less than EUR 300,000, inclusive of Value Added Tax (VAT). The grant amount should not exceed 90% of the total project cost, and the total matching (counterpart) funding should equal 10% of the total cost. The full matching funding can be provided as an in-kind contribution.

The duration of the grant and the supported project is expected to be between 12 – 18 months from the date the agreement is signed.

Theme 3: Training Innovation in Informal Sectors

The amount requested should not be more than EUR 300,000 and not less than EUR 150,000, inclusive of Value Added Tax (VAT). The grant amount should not exceed 90% of the total project cost, and the total matching (counterpart) funding should equal 10% of the total cost. The full matching funding can be provided as an in-kind contribution.

The duration of the grant and the supported project is expected to be between 12-18 months from the date the agreement is signed.

3.6.2. Matching Funding (Co-Financing)

SIFA grants shall be met with the applicant's (counterpart) contribution. The minimum required counterpart contribution for the different Calls is described as a percentage of the total project cost. The contribution is intended to be provided in-kind but may also be in cash, including through the payment of taxes and duties. The provision of in-kind goods or services during project implementation should be priced. Both in-kind and possible cash contribution amounts must be auditable. In-kind contributions should amount to at least 10% of the total grant funding approved for project implementation. In-kind contributions of project members should be monitored during the project implementation and should be included in all financial reports. In-kind contributions provided by the project members may include the following:

- Use of specialised equipment/facilities owned/needed by the Partnership for market validation.
- Office and test-bed space and infrastructure (e.g., bandwidth) used to include utilities.
- Overhead and administration costs for administering the grant.
- Salaries of the permanent personnel directly involved in the project, calculated in line with the amount of time spent on the project only, including technical, research and administrative support.
- International and local travel, insurance, accommodation, per diems and subsistence allowance for project personnel.

There is no upper limit for co-financing, and a higher share than the minimum 10% is encouraged as it demonstrates commitment, ownership, and risk sharing.

The funds allocated to the Project Lead Partner on behalf of the Project Partnership will be paid in EUR or the equivalent local currency, depending on the Project Lead Partner's account information. Financial reporting should, however, always be in both the expended currency and in EUR.

04. Application Process

4.1. One-Stage Application Process

Application for the SIFA FW3 Call is a single-stage process comprising the submission of a proposal to validate or pilot test an existing solution over a 12-to-18-month testing period, with a selected target audience or test location in one or more of the eight SIFA partner countries. Existing solutions that have had some initial success and impact to scale are eligible to apply, provided that a proposed improvement or different target audience is sufficiently described.

SIFA FW3 financing is allocated on a competitive basis. Interested applicants submit proposals that will be assessed according to the eligibility criteria. All proposals fulfilling the eligibility criteria will be evaluated by an independent panel of independent experts (SIFA FW3 Innovation Expert Panel (IEP)), supported by representatives from SIFA FMT/AUDA-NEPAD, including SIFA National Country Coordinators (CCs).

The proposals submitted for the FW3 Call should be brief, focusing on: the applicant's fulfilment of the selection criteria; a problem statement; an introduction to the potential solution and existing results (if any); an overview of the Partnership and their roles; and an introduction to the key aspects of the activities to be supported over the project implementation period.

In broad terms, the evaluation will assess the following:

1. The feasibility of proposed solutions to be piloted/validated in the local context.
2. The feasibility of the proposed solutions for further take-up after the project is complete.

After the evaluation, the AUDA/NEPAD Grants and Sub-delegation Committee approves the final list of projects selected for funding, and IA negotiations commence between the Project Lead Partner and SIFA FMT/AUDA-NEPAD.

The Project Lead Partner will be informed of the outcome of the evaluation procedure by a letter providing comments related to the proposal evaluated. Only when the evaluation and selection procedures described above are completed will selected projects be informed and invited for negotiations and contracting.

4.2. Description of the Application Process

4.2.1. Preparing and Submitting the Proposal

Interested applicants are required to submit their proposal electronically through the SIFA website once the CfP has been published and the SmartME electronic submission platform has opened (**SmartME opens on 13.01.2023 for Call 1**). The proposal should be submitted by the organisation designated as Grantee/Lead Partner and acting as Project Coordinator by the Project Partnership. After the CfP has been closed (**Call 1 and SmartME closes on 06.02.2023 at 23:59 SAST**), the SIFA FMT and AUDA/NEPAD will inform all Lead Partners whether their proposal was received within the deadline; a reference number will also be provided to enable follow-up during the evaluation process.

The SIFA FMT and AUDA/NEPAD will then screen the proposal to check completeness and compliance with the established criteria. After this eligibility check, the SIFA CCs in the eight SIFA partner countries will check the Lead Partner's status regarding possible bankruptcy or liquidation or any other procedure provided for in national legislation or regulations. The full compliance checks, including the eligibility criteria, are outlined in section 5.1 of this Manual.

The proposals are then evaluated based on the Selection Criteria (See 5.2. Technical Evaluation in this document) by a panel of independent Evaluators (SIFA IEP). The Evaluators act in their personal capacity as experts in innovation and issues related to TVET markets in the SIFA partner countries.

Once the independent panel of experts has evaluated all proposals, SIFA FMT/AUDA-NEPAD draws up a list of the proposed projects ranked according to the total scores achieved in the evaluation. Due consideration is given to gender during the evaluation. Only the proposals in each Theme scoring more than 50% of the total available points can be shortlisted for funding. If there are less than 10 Proposals scoring 50% or above, not less than the eight top-scoring ones in each window are shortlisted.

The final shortlist prepared by SIFA FMT/AUDA-NEPAD presents the scores of the proposals per call Themes and establishes a ranking order amongst them based on the scores achieved in the evaluation. This ranking order informs the AUDA-NEPAD Grant and Sub-delegation Committee which projects can be accepted for funding based on the available budget allocated to the Call. A reserve list of projects with proposals that did not make the cut-off will serve as a backup in case some of the selected applicants withdraw. They are then replaced with the next best candidate.

The list of shortlisted proposals is compiled by AUDA-NEPAD and the SIFA FMT team and submitted to the AUDA-NEPAD IC (technical) and AUDA-NEPAD GDSC (compliance) for review and recommendation. The final decision-making and award of grants is made by AUDA-NEPAD OCEO.

After the decision has been finalised, SIFA FMT/AUDA-NEPAD provides all Lead Partners with the overall results of the evaluation. SIFA FMT sends feedback to all Lead Partners, indicating whether

their proposal was approved for funding or rejected. The feedback includes anonymous comments on the evaluation made by the Evaluators. Following the selection of the projects approved for funding, the Project Lead Partner in question receive an invitation to negotiate the IA with AUDA-NEPAD/SIFA FMT.

4.2.2. The Role of Project Lead Partner

The Project Lead Partner (organisation) play a critical role in the application process and, of course, afterwards once the project is implemented. The Project Lead Partner is the main point of liaison for any communication related to the proposal submitted to SIFA FMT/AUDA-NEPAD. Only the Project Lead Partner can submit the proposal to the SIFA CFP Call Themes. The Project Lead Partner can submit proposals to each of the Call Themes; however, only one project per Project Lead Partner per each Call Theme can be selected for a SIFA FW3 grant. It follows that a maximum of three projects per SIFA FW3 Cfp can be selected for grants from the same Project Lead Partner. Interested organisations can, however, participate as Project Members of different projects submitting proposals. The participation of organisations in other submissions should, however, be made clear in each proposal.

4.2.3. General Rules

1. Proposals received after the submission deadline will be rejected.
2. The proposals shall be submitted in English or French language.
3. All financial information included in the proposals shall be in EUR.
4. AUDA-NEPAD reserves the right to request additional information at any stage of the application process.
5. The SIFA FW3 grant decision is not binding until the IA with Annexes has been signed following successful negotiations. The AUDA-NEPAD Grant and Sub-delegation Committee reserves the right to reject any proposal up to the signing of the IA. All Project Members shall adhere to the AUDA-NEPAD Policy on Anticorruption and Integrity. Consequently, any Project Member who has engaged or engages in any Prohibited Practice (as defined in the aforesaid policy) or in other wilful misconduct is considered ineligible.
6. Frequently asked questions (FAQs) with answers are available on the SIFA website (www.skillsafrica.org) and in the SmartME system.

4.3. Indicative Timeline for SIFA FW3 CfP 1/2022 Application Process

Process Phase	Timeline 2023	Responsible Party
Call for Proposal submission	January/February	Project Lead Partner (on behalf of Project Partnership)
Evaluation of Proposals	February/March	SIFA FMT/AUDA-NEPAD, independent Evaluators (IEP)
Shortlist, longlist and reserve lists approved	March/April	AUDA-NEPAD Grant and Sub-delegation Committee
IA	April	Lead Partner, SIFA FMT/AUDA-NEPAD
Contracting	April	Lead Partner, AUDA/NEPAD

For CfP1, the selection process following the evaluation of proposals (which includes consultations with the KfW) should be completed by April 2023. The formal selection decision following the closing of negotiations that informs all Project Partnerships of the results is sent to the Project Lead Partners by April 2023. The format is a SIFA FW3 Evaluation Summary Report (ESR), which is included in the communication. This communication does not in any way imply or prejudge a decision on funding. It is for feedback only. IA negotiations for successful proposals begin in April with the aim to sign the IA by the end of April 2023.

NB: No paper/physical copies or emailed versions of proposals will be accepted.

4.4. Submission Tool – SmartME

The electronic tool that will be used for the preparation and submission of proposals, SmartME, is available via the SIFA website. The SmartME system is an online system used to manage the SIFA FW3 CfPs cycle, including the administration of IAs. An overview of the system is provided during the information sessions held by the SIFA FMT once the Call has been advertised. The use of this tool holds several benefits for applicants during the preparation and submission process.

The SmartME system automates many aspects of the application process and thus provides easy access to all the relevant information pertaining to the proposal. Since the proposal must be drafted in the format described in this guide, SmartME can help the Project Partnership to optimise efficiency when preparing to submit the proposal. It allows the Project Partnership to cut administrative duties by half and focuses on the implementation of the project.

Applicants can log onto the system once the Call has been advertised and apply directly online. An

applicant can draft, complete, and submit a proposal during each stage of the proposal process without having to store any documentation or lose any unsaved work. All additional documentation can be uploaded into the system and remains available to the applicant if needed. The SmartME system covers the following in the process of the CfP:

1. Submission of the proposal – applicants can draft and submit their entire proposal online and attach all necessary documentation to their proposal. Only the Project Lead Partner can submit the proposal.
2. Internal screening – SIFA FMT/AUDA-NEPAD, with the support of the SIFA CCs conduct screening of all proposals. The Project Lead Partner receives a response via the system to their email as to whether the first submission was successful.
3. External evaluation – the independent Evaluators (SIFA FW3 IEP) conducting the external evaluation use the SmartME system. The Project Lead Partner receives a response via email as to whether the proposal at either stage was successful.
4. Reporting – reporting at the stage of the CfP, as well as subsequent project implementation, takes place on the online platform provided by SmartME. The system assists in generating graphics and other visuals to draw up both project progress and financial reports.
5. Monitoring and evaluation – successful projects can set up a monitoring plan and create timelines and indicators to measure the success of their project.
6. Knowledge management platform – the system also allows for modern collaboration tools, which ensure that all project information is found in one place and is available to SIFA FMT/AUDA-NEPAD and the extended team, including the CCs.

4.4.1. System Registration

To register on the SmartME system, follow these steps:

1. Follow the link to register for the SIFA FW3 CfP 1/2022 as per the advertisement on the SIFA website.
2. Register for the SIFA FW3 CfP 1/2022 by providing your first and last name, email address and your chosen password.
3. Sign into the system and begin with your proposal.
4. Applicants can log out of the system at any time and return to the access point later.

4.4.2. Support, Helpdesk and User Guides

The SmartME system has a fully operational helpdesk support function. This function is located on the applicant's page once logged into the system. The helpdesk responds to a query within 48 hours.

4.4.3. Privacy of Applicant Data

Privacy Policy: AUDA-NEPAD Procurement office collects and uses your personal information for “Procurement Process” when you intend to compete and deliver any service or goods for the organization either individually or as a firm based on your consent. Your personal data is our highest security and kept for a period strictly necessary for the purpose set out. This privacy notice supplements the AUDA-NEPAD standard privacy notice and should be read in conjunction with the same available on AUDA-NEPAD website. [AUDA-NEPAD Protection of Personal Data Standard Operating Procedure | AUDA-NEPAD](#)

05. Proposal Evaluation and Approval Process

This section explains the evaluation and selection criteria for projects proposed for FW3 funding. The SIFA FMT, AUDA/NEPAD and CCs analyse the eligibility of proposals to ensure that applicants conform to the technical requirements of the Call and consider the alignment with national, regional and/or local TVET policy priorities.

5.1. Eligibility Check

The eligibility criteria verified by the SIFA FMT, AUDA/NEPAD and CCs include the following:

1. **Timely Submission of the Proposal (Electronic).** Submission of all proposals is at the SIFA FW3 electronic mailbox location specified in the CfP text. The deadline for submissions is the time and date at the electronic location as specified in the Call. It is non-negotiable and will be strictly enforced. Project proposals that do not meet the deadline specified in the Call shall not be considered.
2. **Proposal Completeness.** The proposal must be signed and include all the information required in this SIFA FW3 Guide for Applicants 1/2022 in the format indicated therein.
3. **Geographic Scope.** SIFA FW3 supports regional projects, i.e., projects implemented in one or more than one country and in a minimum of one of the eight SIFA partner countries.
4. **Proposed Project Duration.** The Call Text, this Guide for Applicants and other supporting project documents provided for interested applicants will indicate that FW3 cannot support initiatives exceeding the initial grant implementation period of 18 months. As such, projects are not expected to have any significant works given the time required for design, tendering, and contracting and the associated AUDA-NEPAD approvals. However, minor activities such as retrofitting in support of equipment or training within the context of COVID-19 space restrictions may be included in proposals.
5. **The proposed grant budget.** The budget needs to be within the provided minimum and maximum amounts of the proposed Call, as indicated in section 3.6.1. On top of the grant budget, the applicants should provide a calculation of their matching contribution in-kind and/or in cash.

Basic Administrative Documents Confirming Eligibility

In addition, to fulfil the basic criteria above, the application must comply with the following criteria to be considered eligible:

1. Document eligibility of the Lead Applicant, with supporting documents.
2. Document the eligibility of Partnership members with supporting documents.
3. Present the project idea in a written narrative (700 words), including the outcome⁴ and a minimum of two but no more than four key outputs (deliverables⁵). Uploading a video or other visual presentation to present the project idea will be an advantage.
4. Describe and document the benefits to be derived by the project's beneficiaries.
5. Upload documentation from beneficiaries to demonstrate the need for the proposed skills. This may include (but is not limited to) job placements (expression of interest letter/commitment letter from employer), labour market survey, national Labour Market Information Systems (LMIS) report, and target market survey.
6. Upload (using the pre-defined form included as an annex to this document) the project results framework with the anticipated outcome and expected results in the form of impact measurable outputs (i.e., with associated outcome indicators).
7. Upload the project budget table, including cost estimations in key categories such as personnel, equipment, travel and other costs, e.g., subcontracting, as well as a grant disbursement schedule per Tranche (using the pre-defined form included as an annex to the CfP application toolkit).
8. Present an overview of the capacities (number of staff and qualifications) to implement the proposed project, including the CV of the proposed Project Coordinator.
9. Present proven copies of the bank statements for the last two years and audited profit & loss and balance sheet not older than three years from the Lead Partner.
10. Present a signed copy of the Partnership Agreement describing the Partnership and working modalities amongst partners, including the ownership of any IPR brought to the project or generated by the project.

Finally, the eligibility screening will note that the proposals are submitted in English or French. Proposals made in other languages will not be accepted.

5.2. Technical Evaluation

Proposals fulfilling the eligibility criteria will be evaluated by an independent pool of experts. The technical evaluation will be conducted against the following indicative criteria:

1. Responsiveness to COVID-19

- Proposals shall clearly outline the reference of the projects to the COVID-19 post-pandemic.

⁴ Improvement or learning that the project will deliver to its beneficiaries. Derived usually from its Outputs.

⁵ Specific tangible and intangible outputs (deliverables) produced by the project as a result of its activities.

- Specifically for Theme 1: the focus on COVID-19 shall be reflected in the project's objective, and the application shall describe how the project addresses the various challenges derived from the pandemic. These may include but not be limited to: (i) mitigate or prevent the short-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on health and youth employability; (ii) ease the medium-term socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on business resilience and labour market demand.
- Specifically for Themes 2 and 3: developing skills of groups that might be more prone to COVID-19 effects (female, youth, vulnerable groups + informal sector) to increase their employability. COVID-19 mitigation is indirect by strengthening the position of vulnerable groups in the labour market. Therefore, the fulfilment of the criteria is not a requirement in the evaluation of the project proposals. However, it is considered a plus if it relates to COVID-19 mitigation.

2. Demonstrated Jobs

Proposals shall demonstrate how the proposed project will:

- Create jobs as demanded by an employer.
- Promote job creation, e.g., entrepreneurship.
- Contribute to job retention by documenting job placements (expression of interest letter/ commitment letter from employer), labour market survey, national LMIS report, target market survey, etc.

3. Demonstrating Value for Money: scalability and demonstrated market relevance of the proposed innovative training

Proposals shall demonstrate the innovation's replicability and/or relevance to proposed markets, sectors and/or other geographical contexts. Applications that launch products/services and or processes that are demonstrably scalable and hence expected to reach more beneficiaries beyond the project, both in the breadth and depth of engagement, will be scored with additional points. Similarly, demonstrated relevance in terms of matching the growth potential of the selected sector in the specific country or demonstrated labour market training needs will be scored with additional points. Partnerships that demonstrate direct engagement with labour market needs or relevance for scaling the proposed innovation in other countries will be scored with additional points.

4. Proposals shall refer to the conceptualisation, development and commercialisation of products, services, or processes solving an identified problem/skills gap in the labour market.

Innovativeness refers to the feature of the solution, i.e., being new to the market or new to a group of people or improving the functionality or access of an existing service. Similarly, a proposal is seen as innovative if it:

- Introduces new skills and competencies to its identified beneficiaries and promotes new learning methodologies.
- Promotes new partnerships between TVET institutions, the informal sector and employers, jointly delivering the proposed innovation integrating entrepreneurship skills in the education and training systems, and
- Provides digital and soft skills that complement the vocational and technical skills required to prepare the youth for employment and commercialise new products/services.
- Applications involving partnerships with demonstrated innovative concepts documented by roles of partners, ownership of the solution, IPR agreement, etc., will be scored with additional points.

5. Demonstrated Viability and Sustainable Future Financing

Proposals shall outline measures and strategies to (financially) sustain the project after the SIFA market validation financing has ended. Proposals involving investment-ready partnerships with a demonstrated commitment to future financial support and/or a credible fund-raising strategy will be scored with additional points.