



Artificial intelligence Supporting CAncer Patients across Europe

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ASCAPE Open Call Guide for Applicants

Dissemination Level

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1 Scope of the ASCAPE open call

ASCAPE Open Call will provide a sum to healthcare institutes and companies with the aim of facilitating the development and assessment of ASCAPE platform and innovative solutions to address the challenges associated with caring for cancer survivors and focusing on one of the following targets: (a) Healthcare Providers should test the ASCAPE AI infrastructure in their facilities and contribute their results and knowledge, (b) AI companies and research teams should contribute with new algorithms for improving or training our AI to address new types of cancer or medical diseases.

Through this open call, ASCAPE Action will fund up to € 250,000 to support applicants in technology and testing activities, as well as to cover costs such as personnel, consumables, or travel expenses.

This call will be open for applicants to submit their proposals from September 2021 to the end of November 2021. Any submitted proposal will be evaluated by the end of December 2021 at the latest. The number of selected proposals is expected to be two for each sub-objective.

2 Technical description

2.1 The Motivation

It is known that cancer treatment is a long-time process that is not only confined in hospitals and clinics. In addition, during the last years has prevailed a trend to patient-centric frameworks and approaches in cancer treatment. Answering these needs, current technology developments, like Artificial Intelligence, is challenging the Iron Triangle concept and holds the promise that health care access and quality can be improved while cost is reduced. AI is able to improve the quality of care by supporting better diagnosis, treatment, and care. Moreover, AI can improve healthcare coverage by optimizing resources and at the same time reducing costs.

ASCAPE aims at disrupting the model paradigm by developing AI models that will improve the Quality of Life (QoL) of cancer survivors while reducing costs to the healthcare systems

and improving access to services. It will do so by (a) collecting input from the patients and their devices directly which leads to more data, and in return increased AI results and quality of care, (b) less administrative effort for collecting data leading to lower cost of care and improving access of care by freeing time and human resources.

2.2 The vision

The main goal is to create an open AI infrastructure that will enable health providers (hospitals, research institutions, companies, etc.) to deploy an edge node locally and execute the AI algorithms on their private data without the need to send their data outside their domain. The data-derived knowledge will be made available to doctors to aid them in their decisions and help provide a better Quality of Life trajectory to their patients.

The long-term vision is to create a framework where multiple healthcare stakeholders will work together and share knowledge about various types of cancer and if possible other kinds of health issues. For the duration of this project, ASCAPE will focus on the training of this AI in two types of cancer, breast, and prostate.

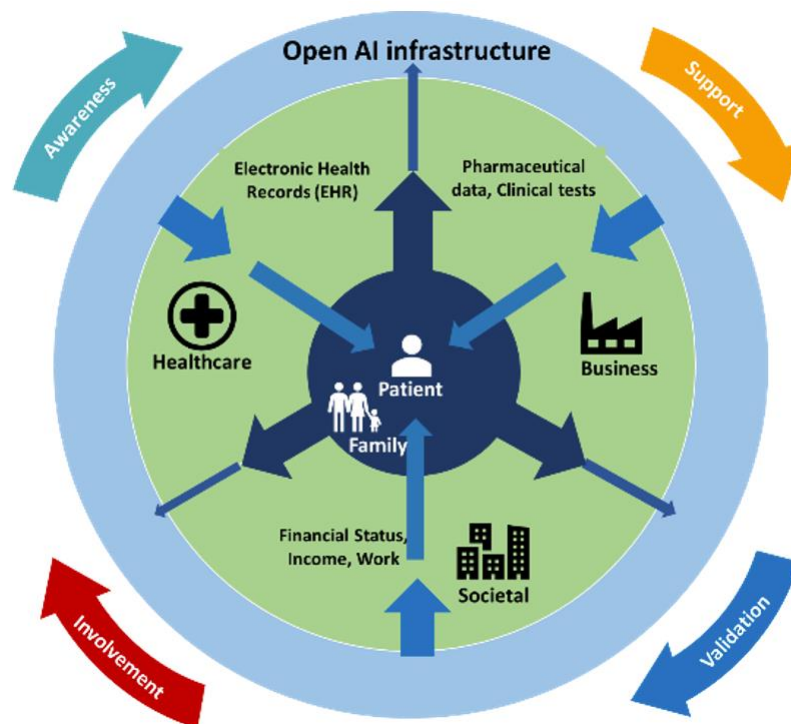


Figure 1 ASCAPE patient-centred approach

2.3 ASCAPE 3 pillars

ASCAPE builds its value proposition around three pillars:

- a) Data-driven ML-based Support for Personalized Healthcare: In order to facilitate cancer patients' treatment in healthcare premises, ASCAPE Edge Node will take advantage of AI analytics on data of their own patients as well as QoL global predictive models provided by ASCAPE and predictive models trained on their own patient data to obtain QoL risk predictions, and model-based suggestions of interventions.
- b) Continuous Data Collection and Learning: Data stemming from the process mentioned above will re-feed the machine learning module in an iterative model.

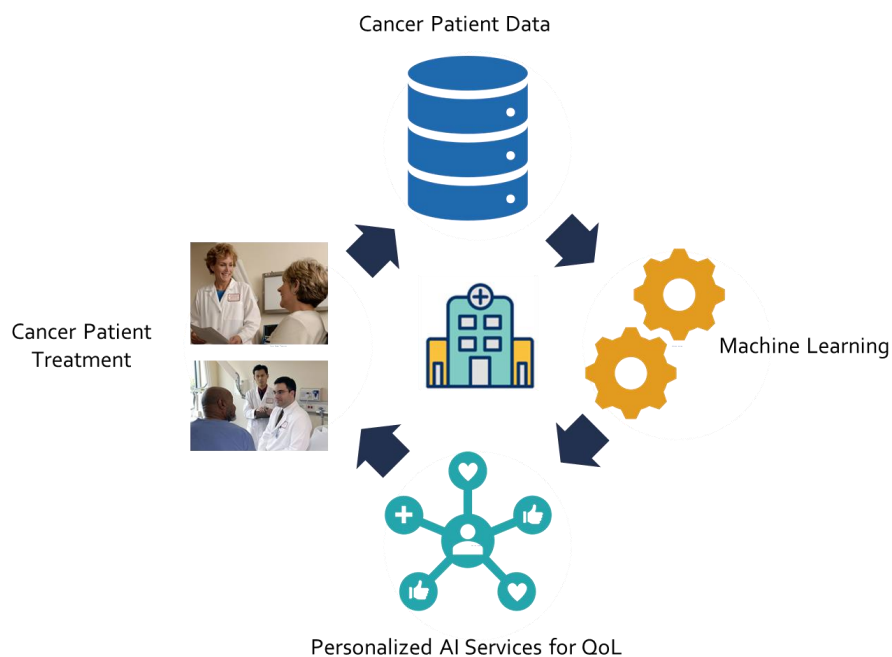


Figure 2 Continuous data collection & learning

- c) Cooperative, Distributed, Open: ASCAPE solution technically supports healthcare stakeholders working together and sharing knowledge about various types of cancer in an open way.

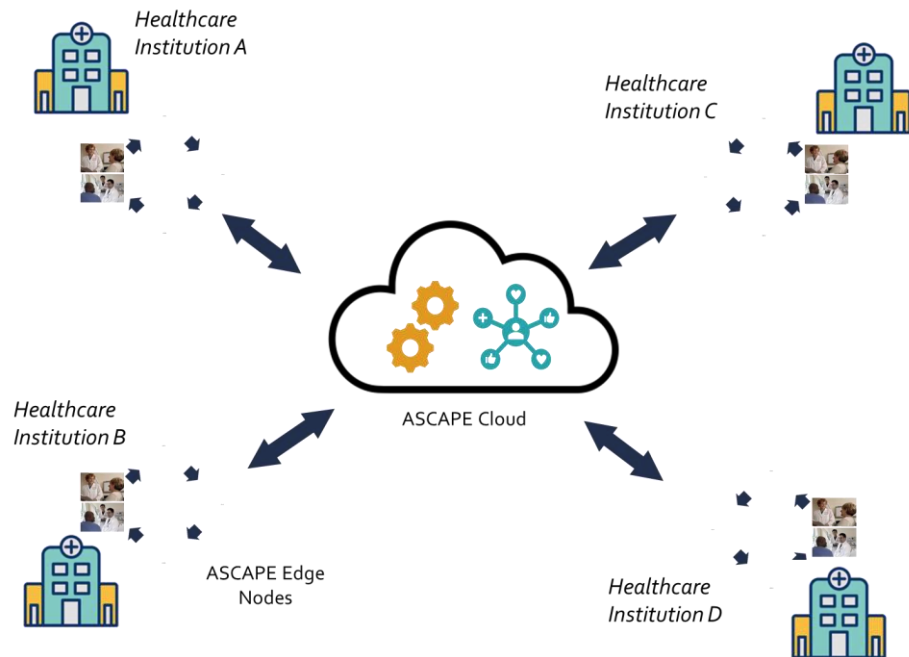


Figure 3 ASCAPE open, cooperative & distributed AI framework

2.4 Technical topics

To achieve its ambitious objectives ASCAPE technical team is working on the following technical topics:

2.4.1 ASCAPE Data Collection and Curation

ASCAPE's machine learning module is fed with a variety of relevant for Quality-of-Life data types such as (i) cancer-type specific medical data from electronic health records including interventions, (ii) quality-of-Life from validated questionnaires, (iii) nutritional information from validated questionnaires, (iii) physical activities from wearable devices (directly collected data from wearable vendor cloud), (iv) contextual variables possibly affecting QoL or adherence to interventions from open databases (e.g. weather/ seasonal data, socio-economic status of the neighbourhood). This data are HL7 FHIR-compliant format.

With regards to data curation inside Edge Nodes, this data will be aggregated and sampled to examination dates and then be pre-processed so as to be ready to use for ML training and analytics (in a CSV file format).

2.4.2 Machine Learning Model Training

ASCAPE brings to the fore a novel model training where federated learning can support the dynamic reconfiguration of the federation (i.e. change of participating clients) and underpin continuous learning from patient data updates (add, remove, update). Moreover, ASCAPE introduces machine learning algorithms on homomorphically encrypted patient datasets to strengthen their privacy.

As far as AI Analytics, ASCAPE has selected the most suitable models for QoL risk predictions, explanations of predictions, and simulations. At the same time, is offered a key variable identification impacting QoL according to models, as well as an option to run simulations to suggest the optimal interventions.

2.4.3 Security of Distributed System

2.4.3.1 Security by design/security

ASCAPE abided by the Security by Design principle. We developed security and privacy mechanisms designed based on Common Criteria (CC) Framework for the distributed ESCAPE edge nodes and cloud. To further enhance security, we apply access control to edge nodes and cloud managed by WSO2 identity server and API manager.

2.4.3.2 Privacy-by-Design by Privacy Enhancing Technologies

ASCAPE gives a lot of attention to Privacy-by-Design and privacy-enhancing technologies. ASCAPE's goal is to prevent a direct or indirect disclosure of personal data. To this purpose, we introduce (i) two-level de-identification between EHRs and ASCAPE AI Framework, (ii) differential privacy to prevent indirect disclosure from ML models, (iii) a federated distributed learning where unencrypted patient data remain at HIS sites only, and (iv) as mentioned earlier model training over homomorphically encrypted patient data on the ASCAPE cloud.

2.4.4 Clinical uptake and value

ASCAPE partners understand that seamless integration of ASCAPE AI services in healthcare practice is a challenging part of the work required to achieve the objectives set. To facilitate a smooth patient data collection, we put in place connectors and converters to transform

healthcare EHR data into ASCAPE data format, and user interfaces to allow ASCAPE to collect wearable data from individual patients.

We also acknowledge that the delivery and access of the information to the respected stakeholders is of utmost importance. So to facilitate the Access and use of AI results, we offer an easy-to-use user Interface for medical personnel, intuitive visualizations of AI results, validation and use of predictive models, and last but not least explanations for AI predictions and suggestions.

3 Rules and Conditions

All applicants will have to abide by all general requirements described in Sections from 2.1 to 2.12 of this Guide for Applicants in order to be considered eligible for the Open Call.

3.1 Type of beneficiary

The accepted applicants for ASCAPE Open Call are companies and healthcare and research institutes of companies developing solutions, ensuring that:

- They are legally recognized (have 'legal entity) and need to have to qualify for H2020 funding.
- The organizations applying should not have had convictions for fraudulent behavior, other financial irregularities, unethical or illegal business practices.
- The participating organizations should not have been declared bankrupt or have initiated bankruptcy procedures.
- It is not under liquidation or is not an enterprise under difficulty according to the Commission Regulation No 651/2014, art. 2.18.
- It is not excluded from the possibility of obtaining EU funding under the provisions of both national and EU law, or by a decision of either national or EU authority.

In case of selection for funding, official documents issued by the relevant national authorities to prove compliance with these conditions should be provided as part of the contracting process with the ASCAPE project.

3.2 Eligible Countries

Applicants from the following countries are eligible to receive funding through this Open Call:

- Member States (MS) of the European Union (EU), including their overseas departments.
- The H2020 Associated Countries

UK entities remain eligible for grants and procurement procedures as if the UK was a member state for the entirety of the Horizon 2020 framework programme, being this is also applicable to financial support to third parties according to Article 204 FR (cascading grants).

3.3 TRL and Technological Areas (applicable to sub-call 2)

In the context of sub-call 2, ASCAPE seeks applications from external AI / ML stakeholders, research teams and SMEs with expertise on cancer related medical applications, AI / ML models and datasets. The applicants shall aim to develop and/or evaluate their AI/ML models on cancer-related datasets and compare them to the AI/ML models or explanation mechanisms developed by the consortium. Alternatively, they may add additional functionalities, tools or datasets complementing the cancer-related tools and datasets of the consortium and demonstrate improved AI/ML-based predictions, simulations, or explanations. Finally, they may use and extend the datasets or the ASCAPE infrastructure to other types of cancer or integrate their own additional functionalities.

Solutions proposed to be applied on synthetic datasets or to enhance the ASCAPE AI platform with new AI/ML-based functionalities should be between TRL₄-TRL₉, and address challenges related to the cancer patient quality of life. Demonstrable improvements in AI/ML model accuracy, efficacy, explainability or simulations may be submitted to the consortium to be reviewed and evaluated to be included in the core ASCAPE framework. The following examples are non-exhaustive categories of quality-of-life-related technology domain, but other solutions/methods with direct positive impact in the broader patient quality of life will be considered.

Possible technology domain on which applicants should select from are the following:

- AI/ML-model training algorithms for quality-of-life issues and interventions
- AI/ML model-based quality-of-life-related prediction
- AI/ML model-based quality-of-life-related analytics
- AI/ML model-based quality-of-life-related simulations
- Dataset extensions to enable or improve AI/ML algorithms
- AI/ML medical solutions that provide novel possibilities to exploit ASCAPE's datasets for the benefit of the patients.

Applicants are requested to select only one technology domain in which their proposal fits. If more than one technology domain applies, select the domain that most closely describes the intended use of the product. If the selected technology domain is not considered aligned with the concept of the proposal, the application will be deemed as non-eligible.

Proposals that fail to demonstrate a TRL under 4 will be deemed as non-eligible. For more information on sub-call 2 please refer to the respective sub-call description.

3.4 Project duration

Projects are expected to have a maximum duration of nine (9) months.

3.5 Financial support

ASCAPE Open Call provides a maximum financial support of EUR 250,000 for three to five beneficiaries with a 100% funding rate. Based on the justification of the budget provided that will be judged by the evaluators, remuneration for the support will be calculated. This money sum will be paid in separate instalments which will be linked to the acceptance of milestones agreed.

The European Commission will monitor that ASCAPE open call and the third-party beneficiaries comply with the conditions for financial support to third parties. In this regard, third-party beneficiaries shall allow the European Commission, the European Anti-fraud (OLAF), and the Court of Auditors to exercise their powers of control on documents, information, even stored on electronic media.

3.6 Eligible costs

The financial support includes the following type of costs:

- Personnel resources needed to implement the project (e.g. define technology challenge, discuss implementation options, develop specific activities, validate results, etc.);
- Consumables, components, and materials for product/technology development.
- Necessary travel, accommodation costs for meetings and validations;
- Support services for product/technology development/validation (examples listed below);
- Overheads (25% of the total costs excluding subcontracting).

In order to be eligible for funding, costs must meet the following criteria:

- Be incurred by the third-party beneficiary during the duration of the action, with the exception of costs relating to final reports and audit certificates;
- Be indicated in the estimated overall budget of the action attached to the grant agreement.
- Be necessary for the implementation of the action which is the subject of the grant.
- Be identifiable and verifiable, in particular being recorded in the accounting records of the third-party beneficiary and determined according to the applicable accounting standards of the country where the third-party beneficiary is established and according to the usual cost accounting practices of the third-party beneficiary;
- Comply with the requirements of applicable tax and social legislation;
- Be reasonable, justified, and comply with the principle of sound financial management.

3.7 Language

English is the official language for ASCAPE Action Open Call. The proposal must be written in English in order to be eligible. During the whole length of the third-party grant process, all communication will be in English and all deliverables will only be accepted if written in English.

3.8 Multiple submissions

Any legal entity will be able to apply with as many projects as wished, but no project can be funded twice by ASCAPE.

3.9 Absence of conflict of interest

Applicants shall not have any actual or/and potential conflict of interest with the ASCAPE Open call selection process and during the whole project implementation. All cases of conflict of interest will be assessed case by case. ASCAPE consortium partners, its affiliated entities, employees, and permanent co-operators cannot become a recipient of financial support via the open call since this would be a breach of the European Commission's rules.

3.10 Ethical Issues

All applicants must comply with ethical principles and relevant national, EU and international legislation such as the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, the European Convention on Human Rights and the EU General Data Protection Regulation.

At the stage of submitting a proposal for ASCAPE Open Call all applicants are obliged to describe the ethically relevant issues and conduct an Ethics Self-assessment starting with the completion of an **Ethics Issues Table - Checklist**, available in the administrative part of the application.

If the applicants specify ethically relevant issues in the ethics issues checklist above, they must demonstrate how these issues will be considered and handled in the envisaged project by completing the Ethics Self-Assessment.

Applicants can read further practicalities in the EU official guide in "[How to complete your ethics self-assessment](#)".

A proposal which contravenes ethical principles or any applicable legislation, or which does not fulfil the conditions set out in Decision No 2013/743/EU, in the work programme, in the work plan or in the open call for proposals may be excluded from the evaluation, selection and award procedures at any time.

3.11 Research activities with Personal Data

The use of Personal Data in research activities is, as a matter of principle, of ethical concern. If applicants plan to use, collect and/or process Personal Data¹ in their research projects, they have to submit an ethics self-assessment (see above) and follow all the procedures required according to institutional, local, national and international regulations for performing a research project with Personal Data.

4 Proposal Submission

4.1 Overall process

Applicants must submit proposals for the ASCAPE Open Call in a single stage through the Funding Box platform, available at <https://fundingbox.com/>.

A complete proposal comprises two components:

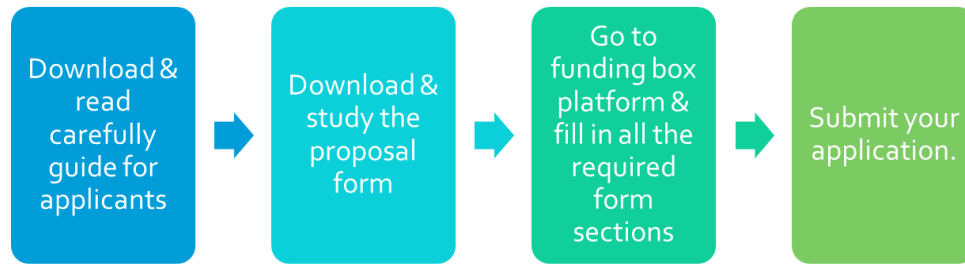
- Application electronic form with general information on the project and administrative data;
- Proposal description document, written in English and submitted through an electronic form.

Only proposals submitted through the Funding Box platform and within the Open Call duration will be accepted. Proposals submitted by any other means will not be considered nor evaluated. Only the documentation included in the application will be considered by evaluators.

If you are interested in applying to the Open Call, please follow the steps listed below:

¹ 1 Personal Data means any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person ('data subject'); an identifiable natural person is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier or to one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of that natural person (art. 2(a) EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Processing means any operation or set of operations which is performed on personal data or on sets of personal data, whether or not by automated means, such as collection, recording, organisation, structuring, storage, adaptation or alteration, retrieval, consultation, use, disclosure by transmission, dissemination or otherwise making available, alignment or combination, restriction, erasure or destruction. (GDPR).



4.2 Proposal description and length

Applicants should download the proposal template from the ASCAPE website and study the structure that will have to follow as well as the word limit so that should ensure that the maximum length for each section is not exceeded.

4.3 Other

Applicants are urged to submit their proposals early on. Applicants must verify the completeness of the form, as it will not be possible to add further information after the deadline. After submitting the proposal, they will be able to modify the form until the deadline.

A receipt of a successfully submitted proposal will be issued to the email address used at the time of proposal registration. The sending of an acknowledgment of receipt does not imply that the proposal has been accepted as eligible for evaluation.

In order to get support during the preparation of the proposal, such as further clarification on the type of support, feedback on certain aspects of a proposal, applicants are encouraged to visit ASCAPE website, download and read the FAQ, and participate in the webinar.

5 Proposal evaluation and selection

ASCAPE's goal is to provide a transparent, fair, and equal evaluation process to all of participants. Your proposal will be evaluated in five phases as demonstrated in the figure below:

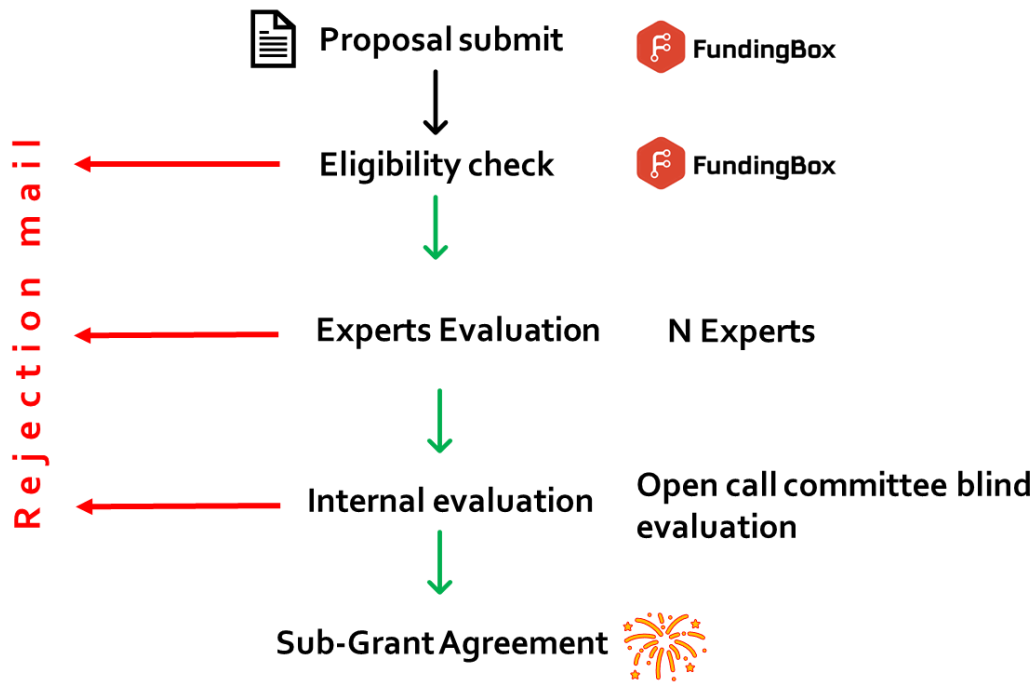


Figure 4 Open call submission process

5.1 Eligibility check

The eligibility check will be done on all proposals submitted before the deadline. All criteria are listed in Chapter 3 of this guide for applicants. Projects that do not comply with these criteria will be excluded and marked as ineligible. ASCAPE Action will inform all applicants of the results of the eligibility test.

5.2 External evaluation

In this phase, the Funding Box platform will undertake the task of compiling a list of external independent evaluators with extensive know-how in the field of artificial intelligence and e-health. The ASCAPE Open Call Committee will then appoint a number of evaluators, from the list, that best fit the scope of the ASCAPE project activities. Your project will be evaluated by these experts according to the following award criteria:

5.2.1 Excellence

The objectives of the application must be SMART (specific, measurable, assigned, realistic, time-bound) and must demonstrate a clear vision from the defined start to finish. The use of

services needs to suit the objectives and needs to support the path towards the market deployment. TRL Level must be demonstrated to be, at least, between 7-9.

Weight: 1, Threshold: 3/5.

5.2.2 Impact

The potential impact of technical contributions or business cases should be based on realistic scenarios and should demonstrate how they can improve their services or products to support cancer patients and the quality of life of them and their families. The proposed solutions must address additional cancer types or medical conditions (than the ones' ASCAPES targets) that leverage the financial support sought. Applicants should also provide a brief plan for communicating with the public so that the community can monitor the progress and impact of the project.

Weight: 1, Threshold: 3/5.

5.2.3 Implementation

The SMEs that will receive the funding will have to prove that they have a team with management and leadership skills, and the ability to take a concept from ideas to a highly changing and evolving market. The team must be balanced and cross-functional, with a strong management background and skills-based.

Participants should also demonstrate the quality and effectiveness of the work plan, including the extent to which the resources available for the project activities are in line with their objectives and results. An important aspect is that you make it clear in the proposal that what you are proposing can be developed using the proposed AI solutions.

Finally, all applicants should describe in detail the targeted objectives (KPIs) and expected results of the project and identify the overall structure of the work plan to achieve them.

Weight: 1, Threshold: 3/5.

5.2.4 Added value contribution in terms of data provision

ASCAPE Action will provide healthcare providers who submit a project to test the ASCAPE framework at their facilities with extra synthetic data. However, even if it is not necessary,

the healthcare providers are welcome to describe and provide their own datasets to run the ASCAPE framework tests.

Weight: 1, **Threshold:** n/a.

5.2.5 Scoring rules

The first three criteria will be scored with the following scale:

- **0:** Proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information
- **1 (Poor):** The criterion is inadequately addressed or there are serious inherent weaknesses
- **2 (Fair):** The proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses
- **3 (Good):** proposal addresses the criterion well, but a number of shortcomings are present
- **4 (Very good):** proposal addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present
- **5 (Excellent):** The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.

Each evaluator will rank the proposal by assigning a score from 0 to 5 for criteria 1 to 3 and will prepare an individual evaluation report. The threshold for individual criteria will be 3. The overall threshold, which applies to the sum of the three individual scores, will be 10. The final score will be calculated as the average of the individual evaluations provided by the evaluators. If the scores on a project show a significant discrepancy between the two evaluators, a third evaluator will be assigned to provide an additional evaluation of this proposal.

For criterion 4, proposals (addressed **only** to healthcare providers) that will carry their own datasets will receive 1 extra point to the overall score. Candidates who do not expect to use their data will receive a score of 0.

Ties will be solved using the following criteria, in order:

- Impact score (especially focused on cancer survivors' Quality of Life),
- Implementation score,
- Excellence score,
- Date of submission: earlier submitted proposals go first.

5.3 Internal evaluation

The ASCAPE Open Call Committee members, will decide by consensus and based on the ranking obtained as a result of the evaluation process, the list of finalists. While normally the highest-ranked proposals are more likely to get funded, the Open Call Committee might have fair reasons for objecting to a specific third party. The list of reasons may include, but is not limited to, the alignment with ASCAPE goals and scope, the ability to achieve the highest impact possible, commercial competition, as well as the existence of significant ethical concerns or a potential conflict of interest. In this case, the choice may pass to the next-ranked proposal. The exact number of proposals to be funded will be decided based on the overall quality of the proposals. Some of the award criteria that the committee will take into account to decide upon the strongest proposition are the following:

- Relevance to the objectives of the ASCAPE Action
- Team competency
- Impact on the quality of life of cancer survivors
- Innovation ability
- Scalability

Prior to making the decisions public, draft call results will be shared with the ASCAPE Project Officer at EC services. Feedback on the final evaluation will be managed through ASCAPE's website and dedicated page on the Funding Box platform. All selected proposals for the internal evaluation will receive a brief summary evaluation report, either accompanied by a letter of rejection or an invitation to enter into an agreement.

6 Additional information

6.1 Obligations of 3rd-party beneficiaries

Each selected applicant will sign the Sub-Grant Agreement with the UBITECH (GIOUMPITEK MELETI SCHEDIASMOS YLOPOIISI KAI POLISI ERGON PLIROFORIKIS ETAIREIA PERIORISMENIS EFTHYNIS), on behalf of the ASCAPE Consortium. The funds awarded under the Sub-Grant Agreement are provided directly from the funds of the ASCAPE Research and Innovation EU-funded Action, and the consortium is managing the funds according to the Grant Agreement number 875351 signed with the European Commission.

The ASCAPE Sub-Grant Agreement will include the set of obligations that the third-party beneficiaries have towards the European Commission. It is the task of the third-party beneficiaries to satisfy these obligations and of the ASCAPE consortium partners to inform the third-party beneficiaries about them.

In regard to promoting the ASCAPE Action and giving visibility to the EU funding, any communication activity related to the action (including in electronic form, via social media, etc.), any publicity, including at a conference or seminar, or any type of information or promotional material must:

- Display the EU emblem and the ASCAPE logo
- Include the following text: "This project has indirectly received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under project ASCAPE (grant agreement No 875351)".

Specific guidelines for communication will be provided in the Sub-Grant Agreement.

6.2 Intellectual Property Rights (IPR)

There are no IPR obligations toward the European Commission nor the ASCAPE consortium. Any IPR that has been introduced or generated by the beneficiaries during the ASCAPE Open Call duration will remain the sole property of the beneficiary. The Sub-Grant Agreement will introduce provisions concerning joint ownership of the results of the selected projects, if applicable. This will be assessed and negotiated case by case.

7 Contacts

In order to get additional support during the preparation of the proposal, such as further clarification on the type of support, feedback on certain aspects of a proposal, applicants are strongly encouraged to participate in the dedicated webinars, study the respective material (FAQ, videos, etc.) that can be found on ASCAPE website and contact the helpdesk.