ESA BIC Hessen Open Call – Issue [A], 20/01/2026
(based on BIC-0008 - ESA BIC Open Call template v1.7, 12/01/2026

Invitation to Apply to ESA BIC HESSEN

Reference: ESA BIC Hessen Open Call – Issue [A], 02/06/2025

Thank you for your interest in ESA BIC Hessen.

The European Space Agency (ESA) together with its Member States supports entrepreneurs with the ambition to exploit space technology or utilise space systems in non-space markets, or become suppliers to the space sector, e.g. by exploiting non-space technology in the space market.

Together with its local partners, ESA manages a network of Business Incubation Centres (ESA BICs) across Europe. In Hessen, cesah GmbH - Centrum für Satellitennavigation Hessen, is responsible for managing ESA BIC Hessen. CESAH is an incubator supported by its local partners as well as its shareholders (the State of Hessen, the City of Science Darmstadt, the Technical University Darmstadt, the University of Applied Sciences Darmstadt, Deutsche Telekom Business Solutions and Telespazio Germany).
The location where start-ups can be incubated is Darmstadt and other locations in Hessen.

ESA BIC Hessen offers a comprehensive package of support to start-ups selected for incubation, including finding office accommodation, incentive funding, technical support, business coaching, and legal/IPR advice to the start-ups selected for incubation.

ESA BIC Hessen hereby invites you to submit your application for business incubation. This document provides an introduction to the application and evaluation process and contains references to the templates that should be used when applying.

Please contact ESA BIC Hessen for any further questions.

Yours sincerely,

Bianca Nöthling & Udo Hermenau

ESA BIC Manager
ESA BIC Hessen

Mail to: incubation@cesah.com

Introduction

The purpose of this Open Call for ESA BIC Hessen is to inform about the opportunity for space-related start-ups to become incubated in ESA BIC Hessen and to provide the material and guidance needed to apply for incubation.

Selection and evaluation of applications are scheduled periodically, see https://cesah.com/index.php/gruenderinnen/esa-business-incubation-centre for details.

The Call is permanently open, has no closing date for the submission of applications unless the ESA BIC Hessen has indicated otherwise.

Who can apply?

In general, any space-related start-ups in Hessen not older than five years, or natural persons with the intention to set up a space-related start-up, are welcome to apply for incubation.

However, some further criteria apply. These can be found in the Cover Letter Template of the application documents. In particular, note the following:

- The application needs to have a valid *space connection*. In general terms this means that it must be evident that "space" (space technology or a space based service such as satellite communication, navigation or earth observation) is actually needed. Alternatively, it must be evident that the proposed technology or service fulfils a need in a space context. It is strongly recommended that ideas related to performing activities or using technology in space are verified by a third party before applying. Please contact the ESA BIC for further guidance.
- Applicants need to run their start-up at their own risk. In practice this means that more than half of the shares must be owned by the entrepreneur(s) that apply to the ESA BIC.
- In case the application is done by natural persons, these need a working permit in Hessen valid for at least the expected duration of the incubation. Also, the process of setting up a company must have been started. The application shall include details about the status, the intended legal structure, and the shares distribution. An incubation contract can only be signed with a legal entity.

How to apply

Please make sure you have received the following documents, which are part of the Open Call documentation:

- Cover Letter including Requirement Checklists
- Business Plan
- Incubation Proposal
- Draft Incubation Contract

Make sure to fill in all required sections in the application templates and pay particular attention to the following:

- Instructions inside the documents (highlighted in blue in each template) shall be followed in order to fulfil all pre-conditions of the Open Call and for the application to be accepted.
- Please read the Draft Incubation Contract carefully. The Cover Letter must include a clear, explicit and unambiguous statement declaring that the applicant has read, understood and accepted the terms and conditions contained in the contractual documentation (this is part of the Cover Letter template). Modifications or amendments to the Incubation Contract may only be done in exceptional cases. Please contact the local ESA BIC Manager for guidance.

- Make sure the Cover Letter and the Requirement Checklists are signed by either the majority shareholder or by shareholders with a combined ownership in excess of min. 51%.
- The incubation proposal should include details on how the incentive funding is meant to be spent. Note that, as a general rule, the incentive funding has a ceiling of 60.000,- EUR and shall be used for purposes linked to the objectives of the incubation. The incentive is provided in two equal parts, one from ESA and one from a local co-funding partner. The ESA part of the incentive can only be spent in Germany. Please see the Draft Incubation Contract for details.
- Incubation in ESA BIC Hessen may be requested for a maximum of 24 months.

Please submit the application documents in electronic form (pdf, maximum three files, one for each required document) to the following e-mail address: application@esa-bic-hessen.de with subject "ESA BIC Hessen Open Call".

ESA BIC Hessen will verify the identity of applicants. You are requested to send digital copies of a passport etc. in a separate file together with your application.

Any questions related to submission of proposals should be sent to: incubation@cesah.com.

The evaluation procedure

The evaluation of all received applications is managed locally by ESA BIC Hessen and follows common ESA BIC procedures.

Once a published submission deadline has passed, ESA BIC Hessen first assesses the formal aspects of applications received before the submission deadline. If a non-compliance of a minor nature is found, the applicant may be asked to address this in an updated proposal within 48 hours. If the proposal is found non-admissible, the applicant will be informed and the reason will be explained. In such a case an applicant is eligible to submit a revised proposal at a later date.

If the application is compliant with the formal requirements, applicants will be invited to hold a presentation to the ESA BIC Hessen evaluation board. The evaluation will typically take place a few weeks after the submission deadline. The evaluation board consists of representatives of ESA BIC Hessen, ESA, DLR and other experts. There will also be an opportunity for the evaluation board to ask questions to the applicant.

The application and the presentation will be marked against the criteria in Table 1, taking weighting factors into account.

Criteria	**Weighting factor**
Background and Experience • Experience and team composition • Support entities • Vision	25%

Technology/Service • Space Connection • Technical feasibility of the product/service to be developed • Production development strategy • Intellectual Property strategy	20%
Value proposition & Market • Value proposition • Market • Competition	20%
Business Modelling and Risk • Revenue model • Finance • Risk	15%
Activity proposal • Quality of the application • Milestones/Cost-planning • Work break-down • Management • ESA BIC investment opportunity	20%

Table 1: ESA BIC evaluation criteria and weighting factors.

All applicants will be notified in writing about the outcome of the evaluation. The applicant may require, within 10 calendar days from the receipt of the notification, an oral debriefing explaining the reason why the application was successful or not.

ESA BIC Hessen will enter into contract negotiations with successful applicants, taking the comments of the evaluation board into account. ESA BIC Hessen has the right *not* to place a contract if, after three months after the notification to a successful applicant, no contract still has been signed, and this is because of a reason for which the applicant can be held accountable.

Additionally, ESA BIC Hessen has the right not to place a contract in case the (intended) legal entity presented in the application is different from the actual established and registered legal entity.

Furthermore, we kindly ask you to pay attention to the following:

- Please note that applications will be treated as confidential. However, the applicant's idea may through this application fall into the public domain (e.g. if local laws require so). Therefore, we strongly recommend that the applicant discusses the protection of his/her idea with a dedicated expert in this field prior to application, and – if relevant – takes appropriate steps to protect the idea (e.g. by applying for a patent).
- As far as allowed by law, any title held by the applicant to his/her idea shall remain vested in him/her. An application to ESA BIC Hessen will not result in the acquisition of any title whatsoever to the idea. *However, ESA retains a right to use the Intellectual Property in specific cases, generally related to publicity and promotion. Please read the detailed conditions described under the section "Use of Intellectual Property Rights" in the Draft Incubation Contract.*

- At the end of incubation the ESA BIC will request one or several deliverables. The purpose of these are both to verify the correct use of the incentive and for promotional purposes. The application should specify suitable deliverables.
- Please don’t apply to several ESA BICs at the same time. Please wait for one application to be evaluated and only if this is not successful, you may apply again to the same or another ESA BIC, taking any feedback into account.
- No expenses incurred in either stage of the application procedure will be reimbursed to the applicant by ESA BIC Hessen, ESA and/or any third party.
- This Open Call does not impose any obligation upon ESA BIC Hessen to enter into negotiations with any applicant.