Second Call for Expression of Interest

CIRCULARINVEST project

http://www.circularinvest.eu/



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Second Call for Expression of Interest

This is the second Call for Expression of Interest (Call for EoI) launched in the framework of the CircularInvest project, an initiative funded by the European Union (EU) under the Horizon Europe programme.

1. Introduction

The rapid change of our climate and the challenges it creates for humanity have made it urgent to shift to a more sustainable and circular development model. Private and public stakeholders have recently initiated circular economy projects, accelerating the sustainability transition of European cities and regions. However, due to the risks entailed, these projects often struggle with finding investments, hindering their implementation.

CircularInvest closes the gap between project developers and investors by helping circular economy projects across Europe become investment-ready and increase their chances to secure financial resources. CircularInvest is one of the Project Development Assistance (PDA) projects operating under the Circular Cities and Regions Initiative (CCRI) of the EU. CircularInvest's PDA services are tailored for circular projects with a sufficient level of maturity that offer a minimum viable product/service or scalable prototype, adopt a clear business model that demonstrates the projects' economic potential. The projects should be innovative, providing unique benefits or advantage to customers as compared to existing alternatives and generate positive impacts (environmental, economic, social) in one or more territories (sub-national: local or regional) in one or more countries eligible in CircularInvest.

Through CircularInvest's services, circular economy project promoters will have the opportunity to:

- Benefit from tailored mentoring sessions delivered by experts to improve the supported projects' circularity, provide/review a business plan and help secure funding.
- Participate in peer-to-peer online workshops with the other supported circular economy project promoters.
- Join online and live pitch sessions with potential investors.
- Take part in knowledge transfer and networking events, as well as in the Circular Investment Readiness Network
- Promote their projects through CircularInvest channels.

CircularInvest will not provide financial resources to the selected circular economy projects but will offer support and networking opportunities.

For more information on the CircularInvest services, please access the CircularInvest platform. https://www.circularinvest.eu

CircularInvest is run by a consortium of 4 organisations (INOVA+, META Group, Circle Economy, ICLEI Europe) that together have the right combination of competences, experience, and a network of experts to make available a set of unique and effective services to circular economy project promoters.

Table 1 includes the definitions of relevant terms that are used in the Call for Eol.

Term	Definition
CircularInvest Consortium	Group of legal entities that are cumulatively responsible for implementing the CircularInvest project as defined in the Grant Agreement number No101081845.
Applicant	Circular economy project promoter(s) that intend to submit or has submitted an application to the CircularInvest Call for EoI.
Beneficiary	Circular economy project promoter(s) that has submitted an application to CircularInvest Call for EoI and has been selected for receiving PDA services and signed a Service Plan Agreement.
Investment Readiness	Capacity of a circular economy project to meet the specific needs and expectations of the different kinds of investors.
Call for EoI	Process through which the applicants can apply for receiving CircularInvest services
Application phase	Period during which applicants can submit applications to the Call for Eol. The Calls for Eol have fixed cut-offs deadlines.
Evaluation phase	Period during which applications are evaluated and ranked. At the end of this phase, all applications are notified of the results of the evaluation.
Independent Selection Committee (ISC) member	An expert who has been appointed by the CircularInvest Consortium to assist in the evaluation of the submitted applications. Experts cannot have conflicts of interest and are bound by confidentiality agreement.
Service Plan Agreement (SPA) preparation and signature phase	Period during which the selected applicants complete the administrative procedures to finalise and sign the SPA.
Implementation phase	Timeline of 6-9 months during which the CircularInvest mentoring services are delivered to the beneficiaries.
Experts	People who are appointed by the CircularInvest Consortium due to their expertise to deliver mentoring support as part of the CircularInvest services to the beneficiaries.

TABLE 1 - TERMS AND DEFINITION



The indicative timeline for the application and evaluation phases of the first Call for EoI is as follows:

Call for Eol opening	17 October 2023, 12:00 pm CET
Deadline for application submission	15 December 2023, 17:00 pm CET
Evaluation phase	16 December – 15 February 2024
Service Plan Agreement (SPA) preparation and signing phase	16 February – 14 March 2024
Start of the Implementation phase	15 March 2024

Further cut-off dates will be launched, at which the submitted applications will be collected and evaluated. More information on this will be published on the CircularInvest platform. <u>https://www.circularinvest.eu</u> <u>APPLICATIONS</u>.

3. Eligibility Criteria

The following eligibility criteria apply for selecting applicants and their circular economy projects for receiving the CircularInvest services:

- Location in an EU Member State or <u>Horizon Europe associated country</u>: ¹Applicants (single entity/organisation or a group of organisations/entities) must be located in an EU Member State or HE associated country.
- Compliance with the EU Circular Economy classification system: The projects must fall under one or more categories of the <u>EU Categorisation System for the Circular Economy</u>.
- Compliance with the EU Circular Economy Action Plan (CEAP) sectors of interest: The projects must address one or more circular economy value chains as stated in the EU Circular Economy Action Plan.
- **Sub-national coverage (regional/local):** The projects must have / aim for a regional/local dimension/impact in a specific geographical area at a subnational level (municipality, group of municipalities and regions in one of the EU member countries or HE associated countries).
- Total investment: The total amount of financial resources sought by the projects must fall under the range of 1M€ (min) 20M€ (max).
- **Commitment from the applicants if selected**: The applicants must commit the necessary human resources to work with assigned experts for implementing the activities agreed with them and join the networking events organised by CircularInvest.

¹ Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Faroe Islands, Georgia, Iceland, Israel, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine,

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• Language: The applicants (and partners, if a consortium is applying) must have a good level of fluency in English. The application form must be filled only in English. Any documents attached to the application form that is in a language other than English will not be considered.

Applications will ONLY be accepted if submitted through CircularInvest platform (see section 5 on Application submission). Paper or email application submissions are NOT admissible.

4. Conflict of Interest

Applications will not be accepted from entities who are partners or linked-third parties in the CircularInvest consortium or who are formally linked in any way to the members/ linked-third parties of the consortium. This excludes, for example, entities that have already engaged with and/ or contributed to the project through specific activities/ initiatives (e.g. external experts). Any individual/ entity with a former link to the CircularInvest consortium (e.g. spin-off), will not be accepted, unless a minimum of 2 years have passed since the termination of the link.

Applicants must not have any current and/or potential conflict of interest with the CircularInvest selection process and the service provision. Applicants must formally and immediately notify the CircularInvest consortium (<u>info@circularinvest.eu</u>) of any situation constituting or likely to lead to a conflict of interests and take all the necessary steps to rectify this situation.

All cases of conflict of interest will be assessed case by case. Applicants must take all measures to prevent any situation where the impartial and objective evaluation and implementation of the project is compromised for reasons involving economic interest, political or national affinity, family or emotional ties or any other shared interest ('conflict of interests'). If a conflict of interest is discovered and confirmed at the time of the evaluation process, the application will be considered as non-eligible and will not be evaluated.

5. Application Submission

CircularInvest is a competitive PDA initiative. Only one application for a specific circular economy project can be submitted to each Call for Eol. In the event of multiple submissions for the same project, only the last application received (timestamp of the system) will enter the evaluation process. Any other submitted application involving the same project application will be declared non-admissibleand will not be evaluated. The same applicant can submit multiple applications if these applications concern different circular economy projects.

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Only applications submitted before the deadline will be accepted. For the deadline, please see section 2. The deadline of the open call will not be extended unless a major problem with the CircularInvest platform makes the system unavailable.

5.1. Applicant registration

To start the application process, applicants need to proceed to their registry on the CircularInvest platform, <u>https://www.circularinvest.eu</u> and create a personal user profile.

In the registration phase, applicants will be asked to provide their:

- Name.
- Surname.
- Email.
- Password.
- Organisation.

5.2. Application preparation

The online **application form** is divided into the following sections:

- 1) General information.
- 2) Project impact
- 3) Consortium
- 4) Business proposition
- 5) Investment proposal
- 6) Support needed

Applicants must consider the following aspects when preparing their applications:

- For the application preparation, applicants are required to apply online and answer all mandatory questions (with no exception).
- Applicants that do not accept the terms and conditions, and the Data practices will not be admissible. A full list of applicants will be prepared containing their basic information for statistical purposes only, which will also be shared with the European Commission (EC) / Research Executive Agency (REA) for transparency.
- Applicants are recommended to be specific and concise. Questions in the online form have character limitations.
- The online application form automatically saves the introduced contents. Applicants can thus draft their applications in different stages before theirfinal submission. To submit their applications, applicants need to push the submit button. If applicants have correctly submitted the application, they will receive a confirmation email (please check your spam).

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- If an applicant discovers an error in the submitted application, and the submission deadline has not passed, the applicant may request the CircularInvest team to modify the submitted application (please contact info@circularinvest.eu).
- English is the official language of the CircularInvest Call for EoI process. Applications provided in any language other than English will be rejected.
- Any documents requested in any phase of the application process must be submitted electronically in PDF format without printing restrictions. The maximum single file dimension is 50 MB.

5.3. Data Protection

To process and evaluate applications, CircularInvest will need to collect personal and industrial data. META Group will manage the data submitted through the CircularInvest platform for these purposes. CircularInvest platform's system design and operational procedures ensure that data is managed in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR). Each applicant will accept META Group terms to ensure coverage. It should be noted that CircularInvest requests the minimum information needed to deliver the evaluation procedures. Please check the CircularInvest platform data privacy security policy and measures (https://www.circularinvest.eu).

5.4. Open webinars

Open webinars will be organised to support applicants during the application phase. Please follow the CircularInvest platform (<u>https://www.circularinvest.eu</u>) for more information on the upcoming webinars and on how to register for these events.

6. Evaluation and selection

6.1. Step 1: Eligibility check

An initial eligibility check will be done by the CircularInvest team to filter out and discard non-eligible applications. The eligibility criteria are listed in section 3.

Applications marked as non-eligible (for not meeting one or more of the eligibility criteria) will receive a rejection message. No additional feedback on the process will be given.

In case the CircularInvest team requires further information for the eligibility check, applicants will be requested clarifications.

6.2. Step 2: Preliminary evaluation

Eligible applications will move to the preliminary evaluation performed by the CircularInvest team to filter the most suitable ones.

The preliminary evaluation will be performed based on 3 main criteria:

- Circularity.
- Team and governance.
- Investment readiness.

Each main criterion will rely on a set of specific sub-criteria as defined in Table 2.

TABLE 2 – EVALUATION CRITERIA

Evaluation Criteria	Description
	Circularity assessment – Projects that aim at enhancing synergies across sectors and apply different circular economy strategies higher up in the waste hierarchy will be preferred. This means that the projects will be scored higher if they fall under more than one category of the EU Categorisation System, cover more than one sector of the EU Circular Economy Action Plan, and address waste preventive measures rather than end-of-life solutions.
Circularity	Impact assessment – The CE impact is well identified and quantified via measurable KPIs. It covers various aspects: environmental, social and economic.
	Scalability, replicability and innovation - Projects that demonstrate the potential for scalability, replicability, and innovative approaches will be given priority. Projects that exhibit the capacity to expand their impact, be replicated in different contexts, and introduce novel methods or technologies will receive higher evaluation scores.
	Balance of the consortium partners – The applicant project team is well balanced with the participation of stakeholders from different sectors, such as public, private, civil society and/or academia.
Team and governance	Expertise and skills – The applicant project team executing the circular economy project shows the right expertise and skills to successfully implement and scale the project.
	Governance structure – The governance of the circular economy project is lean and defined, consistent with the business model and roadmap elaborated.
Investment readiness	Business proposition – A clear value proposition is defined and homogeneous with the customers' problems and the market opportunity is estimated; the business plan is clear is quantified. Moreover, a roadmap for development has been defined and technical and operational risks have been identified and addressed as far as possible in relation to the stage of project implementation.



Investment proposal – Project has a clear fundraising strategy with a defined amount of money and a clear list of financial stakeholders. The investment proposition is aligned with the financials and roadmap of the project.

Maturity – The project is mature enough to work on the services provided by CircularInvest.

Each criterion will be scored from 1 to 5. Score values will indicate the following rationale.

TABLE 3 - EVALUATION SCORES

Score	Rationale
1 / POOR	The application fails to address the criterion or cannot be judged due to incomplete or missing information.
2 / FAIR	The application broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses.
3 / GOOD	The application addresses the criterion well, but several shortcomings are present and minor weaknesses would need correction.
4 / VERY GOOD	The application addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present and specific improvements are possible.
5 / EXCELLENT	The application successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.

The applications will receive a YES/NO vote from CircularInvest Team members. Applications need to get 3 YES votes to follow to Step 3 final evaluation. The applications with insufficient YES votes, will get a rejection message.

6.3. Step 3: Final evaluation and Ranking

Applications reaching sufficient votes in Step 2 will move on to the final evaluation phase. This evaluation will be done by external expert evaluators.

The evaluators are members of the Independent Selection Committee (ISC). The ISC is composed of three members. All the eligible applications from Step 2, will be evaluated by all the ISC members.

Applications will be scored based on the same criteria as in Step 2 and will receive a GO/NO Go vote form ISC. Applications holding at least two GO votes, will be considered as potential beneficiaries.

6.4. Step 4: Consensus meeting and Selection

Once the final ranking is ready, a selection meeting between ISC members and the CircularInvest team will be organised. Following the consensus meeting, the CircularInvest Team will vote GO/NO GO on the listed projects. To be selected, applications must collect at least 3 GO votes.

The selected applications will be reviewed during a validation meeting with the EC/REA. During this meeting applications will receive or not the official approval of the EC. All the applications officially approved will be invited to sign a Service Plan Agreement (SPA). Applications that are not selected will be notified.

6.5. Redress process

Within three (3) working days from the date of receiving (1) an email informing about the application being non-eligible or (2) not passing the evaluation steps, an applicant may submit a request for redress if they believe the applications have not been correctly assessed. In such a case, a CircularInvest internal review committee will examine the applicant's request for redress. The committee's role is to ensure a coherent interpretation of such requests, and equal treatment of the applicants.

Requests for redress must:

- Be related to the evaluation process or eligibility checks.
- Clearly describe the complaint.
- Have been received within the time limit (three (3) working days) from the reception of the rejection email.

The committee will review the complaint and will recommend an appropriate course of action. If there is clear evidence of a shortcoming that could affect the eventual decision, it is possible that all or part of the application will be re-evaluated.

Please note:

- This procedure is concerned with the evaluation and/or eligibility check process. The committee will not question the subjective judgment of the evaluators.
- A re-evaluation will only be carried out if there is evidence of a shortcoming that affects the final decision on whether to select the application or not.

The evaluation vote following any re-evaluation will be regarded as definitive.

All requests for redress will be treated in confidence and must be sent to CircularInvest team at: <u>info@circularinvest.eu</u>

In the case where an application under the redress process is re-evaluated and the re-evaluation final vote is positive, then the applicant becomes a CircularInvest beneficiary.

7. Service Plan Agreement preparation and signature

At the end of the evaluation and selection phase, selected applicants will enter the SPA preparation and signature phase. The best ranked not selected applications in Step 3 final evaluation will first remain on a reserve list for the case a selected application fails to sign the SPA.

7.1. SPA preparation

The objective of SPA is to establish a legal relationship between the CircularInvest consortium and the selected applicants.

The SPA preparation will also run through an administrative check. The CircularInvest team will draft a list of services based on the specific gaps identified during the evaluation of the selected applications.

Once the SPA is sent to the selected applicants, the CircularInvest team will organise an online onboarding meeting to discuss the SPA with them. If during the meeting other service needs are identified within the CircularInvest services portfolio, the CircularInvest team will adapt the SPA accordingly.

If the SPA is not accepted by the applicants, the application will be rejected and the first ranked application in the reserve list will be selected and invited to the SPA preparation and signature process.

7.2. SPA signature

Once the SPA is accepted, it will be signed between CircularInvest consortium and the applicant representatives.

The SPA preparation and signature is expected to be concluded within 2-3 weeks. An additional week may be provided by the CircularInvest coordinator in case of a valid reason. In case the SPA preparation and signature have not been concluded within the mentioned period, the selected application will automatically be rejected and, if applicable, the first ranked application in the reserve list will be selected.



8. Implementation

After the finalisation and signing of the SPAs, beneficiaries will move into the implementation phase. The mentoring services present in the SPA will be delivered within 6-9 months.

9. Communication and additional information

• All general queries should be sent by email to info@circularinvest.eu

The CircularInvest team must be immediately notified about any changes to the applicants' contact details.

Annex 1: Application Form template

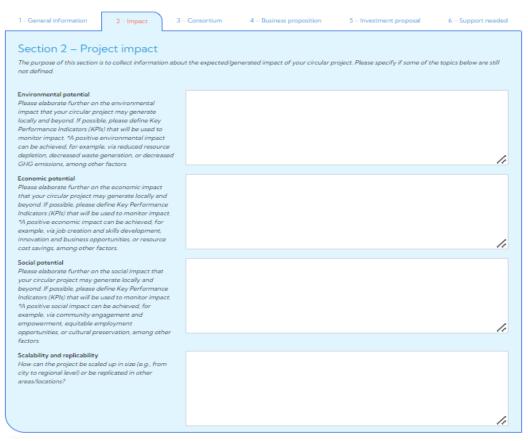
Below you can find the template images for each section of the application form:

• Section 1 – General information

1 - General information 2 - Impact 3	- Consortium	4 - Business proposition	5 – Investment proposal	6 – Support needed
Section 1 – General information	n			
The purpose of this section is to collect information abo	ut your circular proje	ct.		
Project name Please state the name of your circular project.				
Project website Please enter your project website, if available				
Country 🕡 Please insert the country where the project is developed	Select the country			•
Funding needed Please specify what is the amount of funds needed to implement your circular project (the money you are looking for).				
Project summary Please describe the project in a non-technical language, focusing on its objectives, the problems/heeds addressed, the services/solutions developed.				
If you have a presentation of your project (pitch), please upload it here One file, .pdf only, the maximum file size is 50MB	SELECT DOCUMENT	Select document		
Geographical scope (region/municipalities/city) of your project. Please describe in which geographical area your project is supposed to generate an impact.				
				11
EU Categorisation system 🕢 The EU Categorisation System for the Circular Economy defines 14 circular categories, please indicate which one applies to your project. (Multiple choices)	Select the circular	category		
If none apply, please explain why:				
During the interview				1

Project circularity Please provide a detailed explanation of why your project can be considered circular. Describe the circular EU categories, EU sectors and innovative practices that are central to your project's design and implementation.		
	11	
Sectors of interest The EU Circular Economy Action Plan defines 5 value chains of interest for the circular economy, please indicate which one applies to your project. (Multiple choices)	Please select the value chains addressed by your circular project:	
If none apply, please explain why	1	
Language All CircularInvest services will be conducted in English. Please confirm that the project team will be capable of fully participating in the CircularInvest program in English.	☐ Yes	
Project team commitment If the project is selected, please indicate if the key people involved are able to commit their time to participate in the services provided by CircularInvest in the next months	☐ Yes	
Local challenges Please describe the local/regional (sub-national) challenge that your project addresses and outline your project's strategy for addressing it.		

• Section 2 – Project impact

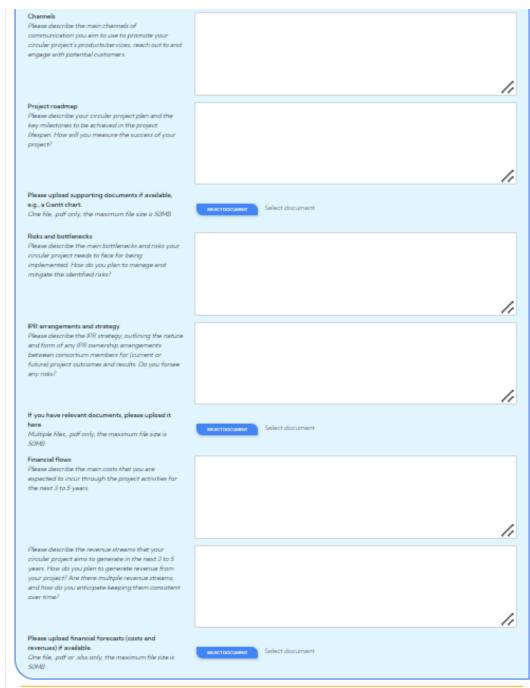


• Section 3 – Consortium

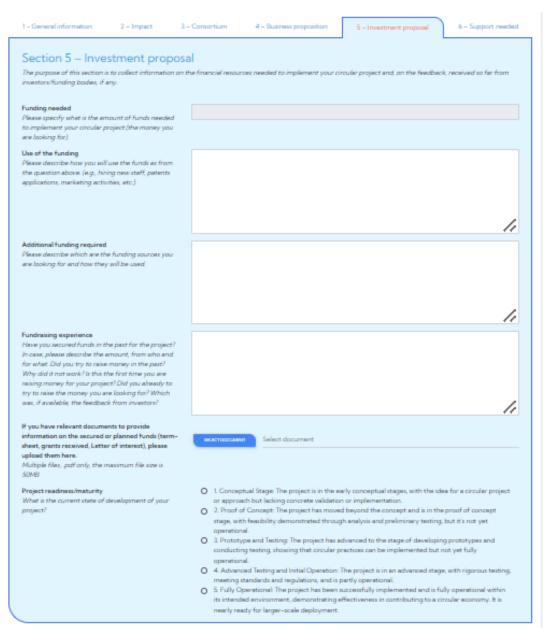
1 - General information 2 - Impact	3 – Consortium	4 - Business proposition	5 – Investment proposal	6 – Support needed
Section 3 – Consortium The purpose of this section is to find out more about t	the members and gove	mance of your consortium.		
Project partners - who will be involved in this project Please give details on the partners who are involved in Organisation name Type Web	n your project.	Country	Role	
No data available in table				
+ ADD ORGANISATION				
Project team Please present each key member involved in the impl the short bio any relevant experience and backgroum First name Last name Emai	d linked to the role in th	he project.	surname, email and providing a sho Organisation	rt bio. Please highlight in
No data available in table			-	
+ ADD TEAM MEMBER				
Institutional support Do you have an institutioanl support in place? If you have any supporting documents (e.g. letters	O Yes O No	5		
of support, partnership in place, etc.), please upload these here Multiple files, .pdf only, the maximum file size is 50MB	SILECT DOCLMENT	Select document		
Link to territorial strategies Is your project connected (to some extent) with regional/territorial strategies (e.g. Climate plans, land use plans, waste management plans, etc.). Please specify the regional/territorial document/reference				1.
-				
Governance structure Please describe the governance structure in place for this circular project, including key roles and responsibilities of team members or partners.				
				li
If you have a relevant document (organisational chart), please upload it here One file, .pdf only, the maximum file size is SOMB	SELECT DOCLMENT	Select document		
Legal form Please describe under which legal form of agreement the partners operate. For example, this may be under a consortium agreement or a Memorandum of Understanding between partners, for more advanced projects, a legal entity may exist (e.g. Joint Venture, NewCo, etc.).				
If you have documentation for any such agreement, please upload it here Multiple files, .pdf only, the maximum file size is SOMB	SELECT BOOLMENT	Select document		li

Section 4 – Business pr	oposition			
1 - General information 2 - Impact 3	- Consortium	4 - Business proposition	5 – Investment proposal	6 - Support needed
Section 4 – Business propositio The purpose of the section is to get a good understand below are still work in progress and/or are not defined, j	ing of your circular pr		he ground for future investments	. If some of the topics
Unique Value Proposition Please describe the Unique Value Proposition of your project's products and/or services. In other words, explain why your products and/or services are the best option compared to what is available today, and how they specifically meet the unique needs of your customers. What are the main competitive advantages that set your offerings apart?				1
Business model/Use model Please describe the business model/use model and how it will allow the achievement of your circular project's impact.				
Products/services Please describe here the expected products or services you will develop/finalise within your circular project.				
Customer segments Please describe the customer segment(s) of the products and/or services you will develop/finalise with your circular project. How will you serve customers' needs?				
Market patential and competition Please describe here the market opportunity for your circular project's product/services and the main competitors who are developing alternative solutions for your customers.				1
If you have a relevant document showing a market analysis, please upload it here One file, .pdf only, the maximum file size is SOMB	SELECT DOCUMENT	Select document		

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• Section 5 – Investment proposal





• Section 6 – Support needed

The purpose of this section is to understand which serv	ices would be beneficial for your circular project in order to apply for funding and implement it.	
Please select what kind of support you expect from CircularInvest to finalise your investment proposition At most 3 choices	Select your options	
Additional needs If you are looking for additional services, please let us know here		

More info: https://www.circularinvest.eu









