

ENLIGHT IMPACT AWARDS 2026 Call for Nominations

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INTRODUCTION

[ENLIGHT](#) is a European University Alliance to promote equitable quality of life, sustainability and global engagement through Higher Education transformation. ENLIGHT brings together ten research-intensive universities from ten European countries (University of the Basque Country, University of Bern, University of Bordeaux, Comenius University Bratislava, University of Galway, Ghent University, University of Göttingen, University of Groningen, University of Tartu, Uppsala University).

Impact is at the core of the [European University Alliance ENLIGHT](#) mission. One of ENLIGHT's key objectives is to **promote a culture of impact both within and beyond its partner universities**, by developing good practices of impact-directed management, integrating impact into higher education, research, innovation and societal engagement.

In ENLIGHT we understand **IMPACT** as the **effects or changes** we can see (demonstrate, measure, capture), **within**¹ and **beyond**² academia which happen because of an activity or intervention in the higher education environment (caused by, contributed to, attributable to). Impact is intrinsically linked to **transformation** and to transformative initiatives, programmes, projects, activities.

ENLIGHT IMPACT AWARDS

Building on the successful experience of its first three editions, the **ENLIGHT IMPACT AWARDS 2026** seeks to **recognise and give visibility to ENLIGHT COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVES that are EXEMPLARS IN PLANNING FOR, ACTING TOWARDS AND ACHIEVING IMPACT**.

A maximum of **six ENLIGHT IMPACT AWARDS** will be presented; including, ideally and if possible, one AWARD in each of the six [ENLIGHT focus areas](#):

- Health and Well-being
- Digital Revolution and Digitization
- Climate change
- Energy and Circular Economy
- Culture and Creativity
- Equity

Applications are invited from **ENLIGHT COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVES**³, whether financially supported by the Alliance or not, and **must be nominated by the initiative coordinator's home university, through a defined internal selection process** (*see selection procedure, eligibility and selection criteria sections for further details*).

¹ Within: on learners, academics (teachers & researchers), non-academic staff, management, Higher Education Institutions (processes, structures, etc.).

² Beyond: on society, economy, environment, culture, regional ecosystems, etc.

³ By ENLIGHT collaborative initiative we understand an initiative developed in the ENLIGHT context, involving teams from at least 3 different ENLIGHT partner universities. They can be financially supported by the Alliance or not. Examples of eligible initiatives include ENLIGHT Thematic Networks, ENLIGHT Incubator Grants, ENLIGHT+ supported initiatives, or any other ENLIGHT collaborative initiative involving at least 3 different ENLIGHT partner universities.

The ENLIGHT Impact Awards will be presented during the **ENLIGHT Impact Conference** at the Comenius University Bratislava on the 11th and 12th February 2027. The ENLIGHT Impact Conference will bring ENLIGHT academics, university leaders, learners, administrative and support staff, together with societal stakeholders and international impact experts and practitioners. It will be the setting in which the **ENLIGHT Impact Awards will be recognised and celebrated.**

THE ENLIGHT IMPACT AWARDEES

All members of the awarded teams will be recognised as part of the ENLIGHT Impact Community and assume the role of “ENLIGHT Impact Ambassador”.

The awarded teams may include academics (teachers or researchers) of all levels of seniority and areas of expertise, management and support staff, and learners directly participating in an ENLIGHT collaborative initiative. They should demonstrate how they are jointly embedding impact into their ENLIGHT collaborative initiative and how this will ultimately contribute to change.

Regardless of their field of expertise, discipline focus, seniority and position at the university, the ENLIGHT Impact Awardees are enthusiastic and outspoken supporters of impact in the university context. Besides their contribution to impact, they should show a **genuine interest and motivation to commit to and be part of the [ENLIGHT Impact Community](#)**. They should be able to communicate effectively and have their voice heard within their institution, ENLIGHT, and among international peers.

ENLIGHT Impact Awardees will not have executive tasks or assignments within the Alliance, but they are expected to function as a sounding board and as “**role models**” within and beyond the ENLIGHT Alliance. More specifically, and with the support of the ENLIGHT Impact Task Force, the ENLIGHT Impact Awardees are expected to:

- **Inspire**
Act as “role models” to other academics, management and support staff and/or learners by showcasing and giving testimony on their collaborative initiative’s impact pathway.
- **Reach out**
Raise awareness about the importance of impact by engaging in outreach activities, participating in mutual learning and exchange of experiences and insights, connecting with ENLIGHT Impact Ambassadors Network, the ENLIGHT Impact Task Force and beyond, and thereby contributing to improved impact literacy across ENLIGHT and beyond.
- **Promote**
Promote ENLIGHT impact work and act as impact multipliers across different fields of knowledge and regional, national and international networks, supporting and advising the ENLIGHT Impact Task Force, where needed, on the implementation of its activities (e.g. identifying contributions for the [ENLIGHT impact repository](#); contributing to impact training programmes; etc.).

Level of engagement

From February 2027 onwards, the time commitment for ENLIGHT Impact Awardees is expected to remain limited and flexible, depending on their availability and capacity to engage. A typical annual commitment could include:

- Prepare a “**Story of the ENLIGHT Impact Journey**” for publication on the ENLIGHT website and [Impact Repository](#) with the support of dedicated mentors.
- **Participate in one or two international workshops or conferences** to promote ENLIGHT and the collaborative initiative’s impact approach.

WHAT IS IN IT FOR YOU?

Each ENLIGHT Impact Award recognises exemplary impact work within the ENLIGHT collaborative initiative. More concretely, it provides:

- **Increased recognition and visibility** of your ENLIGHT collaborative initiative, its impact approach, and pathway, through the [ENLIGHT website](#), the [ENLIGHT impact repository](#) (including Impact Journey Stories), the [ENLIGHT Impact Ambassadors webpage](#), ENLIGHT social media, and international workshops and conferences (e.g. [ENLIGHT Impact Conferences](#)).
- **Mentoring and training opportunities** on how to develop impact narratives, including how to draft an Impact Journey Story and how to prepare and deliver an impact pitch.
- The opportunity to join a **wide-reaching network** of impact awardees involved in other collaborative initiatives, in close contact with the ENLIGHT Impact Task Force, and to connect with other impact networks in which ENLIGHT is represented (e.g. [FOREU4ALL Impact Topical Group](#)) and/ or has strong links with ([EARMA Impact Thematic Group](#), [University Industry Innovation Network](#), etc.).

SELECTION PROCEDURE

The selection procedure is organised in two phases:

1. **Each ENLIGHT partner university is invited to submit AT LEAST ONE and a MAXIMUM OF THREE APPLICATIONS, from collaborative initiatives coordinated by its institution for consideration for the ENLIGHT Impact Awards** (internal selection process).
2. **The nominated initiatives will subsequently be evaluated and ranked by an evaluation panel, composed of both external and ENLIGHT impact experts, taking into account the observations and recommendations of the ENLIGHT representatives responsible for overseeing the collaborative initiatives.** The final ranking will also take account of the results of the public vote (see selection criteria) held during the ENLIGHT Impact Conference (Comenius University Bratislava, 11-12 February 2027).

Ideally, an ENLIGHT IMPACT AWARD will be awarded in each of the 6 focus areas; however, depending on the submissions and the conclusion of the evaluation process, not all of the ENLIGHT focus areas will necessarily be represented in the AWARDS.

Internal process

The internal procedure for nominating ENLIGHT collaborative initiatives is defined independently by each partner university and is therefore not standardised across the ENLIGHT Alliance.

In addition to the ENLIGHT Alliance's own dissemination channels⁴, each university is invited to circulate this call to all potential eligible candidates, i.e., representatives of ENLIGHT collaborative initiatives, and to identify potential candidate initiatives through transparent and inclusive processes.

To facilitate the internal selection process, the ENLIGHT Impact Task Force provides ENLIGHT universities with an example of an ***expression of interest form*** that may support a first pre-selection of up to three potential nominations per university (Annex 1). This template is based on the experience of several ENLIGHT universities that used similar approaches in previous editions of the ENLIGHT Impact Awards. Its use is **NOT COMPULSORY**.

Eligibility and Selection Criteria

The candidate ENLIGHT collaborative initiatives must apply using the **application form**⁵ (Annex 2) taking due account of the following eligibility and selection criteria:

Eligibility Criteria:

- **ENLIGHT COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVES, must be nominated by the initiative coordinator's home university and involve teams from at least 3 different ENLIGHT partner universities.** They can be financially supported by the Alliance or not. Examples of eligible initiatives include ENLIGHT Thematic Networks, ENLIGHT Incubator Grants, ENLIGHT+ supported initiatives, or any other ENLIGHT collaborative initiative involving at least 3 ENLIGHT partner universities.
- The nominated teams may include academics (i.e. teachers, researchers, or both), regardless of seniority level (from R1 to R4, according to [EURAXESS definition](#)) or area of expertise, as well as management and support staff, and/or learners directly involved in the ENLIGHT collaborative initiative.
- The initiatives must be developed in the university context, including activities related to education and training, research and innovation, and/or service to society⁶.
- The initiative should have been launched and/or implemented within the last five and a half years, i.e. between November 2020 and June 2026.

Selection Criteria:

The nominated initiatives will be assessed against the following criteria:

- **Joint team effort (10/100)**
The evaluators will place particular emphasis on the extent to which the initiative demonstrates collaboration among the different team members and their roles and contributions to the impact pathway. Particular consideration will be given to elements such as:
 - Teams involving senior and early career academics, or learners.
 - Involvement of management and support staff.

⁴ ENLIGHT website, social media, newsletter and targeted emails to the coordinators of ENLIGHT supported collaborative initiatives.

⁵ See Annex 2.

⁶ It could be an education and training programme (courses of any kind of format, programmes, summer/winter schools), research & innovation projects, citizen science initiatives, mobility programmes, leadership and entrepreneurship programmes, etc.

- Participation of different teams from different fields of expertise and discipline focus (e.g. Arts & Humanities, Medicine & Health Sciences, Social Sciences, STEM).
- **Contribution to addressing ENLIGHT focus areas** (health and well-being, digital revolution and digitization, climate change, energy and circular economy, culture & creativity, equity)⁷ **(10/100)**
The evaluators will assess the extent to which the initiative’s impact pathway underpins or contributes to the ENLIGHT focus areas.
- **Stakeholder⁸ engagement (30/100)**
The evaluators will assess the extent to which relevant stakeholders are involved across the initiative lifecycle (design, implementation, communication, etc.) and throughout the pathway to impact.
- **Impact pathways (30/100)**
The evaluators will assess the extent to which the initiative identifies expected, intended, and/or achieved outcomes and impacts⁹, as well as the approaches and efforts deployed to maximise its impact potential. Where outcomes and impacts are still anticipated, applicants should describe the mechanisms and indicators that will be used to monitor and assess the impact. Where outcomes and impacts have been achieved, quantitative and qualitative evidence should be provided.
- **Interest and motivation (10/100)**
The evaluators will assess the interest, motivation, and commitment of the team to apply, actively engage in, contribute to, and be represented within the ENLIGHT Impact Community.
- **Impact pitch (10/100)**
In a 3-minute pitch, ENLIGHT Impact Awards Nominees are invited to present the story of their collaborative initiative’s impact journey to the ENLIGHT community and a panel of international impact experts. To support nominees in preparing their pitches, dedicated coaching sessions will be organised. The exact dates of these support sessions will be communicated in due time. The score for this criterion will be based on the results of an electronic public vote conducted during the ENLIGHT Impact Conference (12 February). The average public vote score received for each initiative (0-10 points) will be added to the score obtained under the other selection criteria (0-90 points).

Applications

Applications should be sent by the **ENLIGHT university liaison** (see contacts list below) to the ENLIGHT Impact Task Force (impact.enlight@ehu.eus) using the above-mentioned form in PDF (Annex 2).

⁷ For further details, please consult <https://enlight-eu.org/university-about-us/flagship-domains>

⁸ Stakeholders are those (directly or indirectly) affected by the initiative. They may include learners, academics, support staff, middle managers or institutional leaders (especially in the case of education and training initiatives), as well as societal stakeholders such as business organisations, policy makers and public administrations, civil society organisations, and citizens. Stakeholders may also include non-human systems and assets affected by the initiative, such a natural environment, biodiversity, cultural heritage, and broader economic and social systems.

⁹ See Annex 3 for further guidance on key impact concepts and examples.

Timeline

Call for nominations published	8 July 2026
ENLIGHT Universities internal selection procedure	July 2026 – 15 November 2026
Online session: Understanding Impact in the Academic Context (open to all ENLIGHT collaborative initiatives' participants)	2 October 2026 10h00-13h00 CET
Deadline for nominations by ENLIGHT universities	15 November 2026
Evaluation	15 November 2026-31 January 2027
Impact pitch support to nominees	December-February 2027
ENLIGHT Impact Conference and Awards Ceremony	11-12 February 2027
Mentoring to Awarded teams on how to prepare an Impact Journey Story	March 2027

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

For any questions you can contact either the ENLIGHT Impact Task Force (impact.enlight@ehu.es) or your ENLIGHT university liaison at:

- University of the Basque Country: enlight@ehu.eus
- University of Bern: enlight@unibe.ch
- Comenius University Bratislava: enlight@uniba.sk
- University of Bordeaux: enlight@u-bordeaux.fr
- University of Galway: enlight@universityofgalway.ie
- Ghent University: enlight@ugent.be
- University of Göttingen: enlight@uni-goettingen.de
- University of Groningen: enlight@rug.nl
- University of Tartu: enlight@ut.ee
- University of Uppsala: enlight@uu.se