EDF 2026: Evaluator-Oriented Proposal Strategy

The European Defence Fund 2026 mobilises **~€1 billion** across 10 calls and 31 topics. A single submission deadline of **29 September 2026** demands early, structured preparation — with evaluator expectations at the centre of every design decision.

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EDF 2026 at a Glance

€1B	10	31	29.09
Total Budget	Calls for Proposals	Funding Topics	Submission Deadline
			17:00 Brussels time

Call opens **11 February 2026**. EDF Info Days (hybrid, Brussels & online): **10–11 March 2026**. EDF is not a general innovation programme — it is an EU instrument to strengthen the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB), reduce critical dependencies, and accelerate capability-relevant R&D.

Strategic Capability Areas

Air & Missile Defence

Ground & naval combat systems

Digital & Space

Cybersecurity, advanced sensors, digital transformation

CBRN & Medical

Defence medical support and CBRN capabilities

Disruptive Tech

EUDIS SME & innovation actions

Consortium Rules & Funding Logic

Consortium Requirements

- Minimum 3 independent entities in 3+ EU Member States or EDF-associated countries (e.g. Norway)

- Executive management must be EU-based

- No control by non-associated third countries (unless exceptional guarantees apply)

- Foreground IP and exploitation under European control

Funding Rates

- **Research activities:** up to 100% of eligible costs

- **Development actions:** co-financed at varying rates with potential bonuses (SME participation, PESCO conditions)

- **Lump-sum actions:** budget assessed ex ante — deliverables, milestones and acceptance criteria are decisive credibility factors

How Evaluators Score Proposals

Proposals are assessed on a **0–5 scale** (half points possible) across three award criteria. Traceability is essential: topic requirements → objectives → work packages → deliverables → KPIs → exploitation.

Excellence

Capability relevance, technical credibility, measurable performance targets, step-change potential for disruptive topics
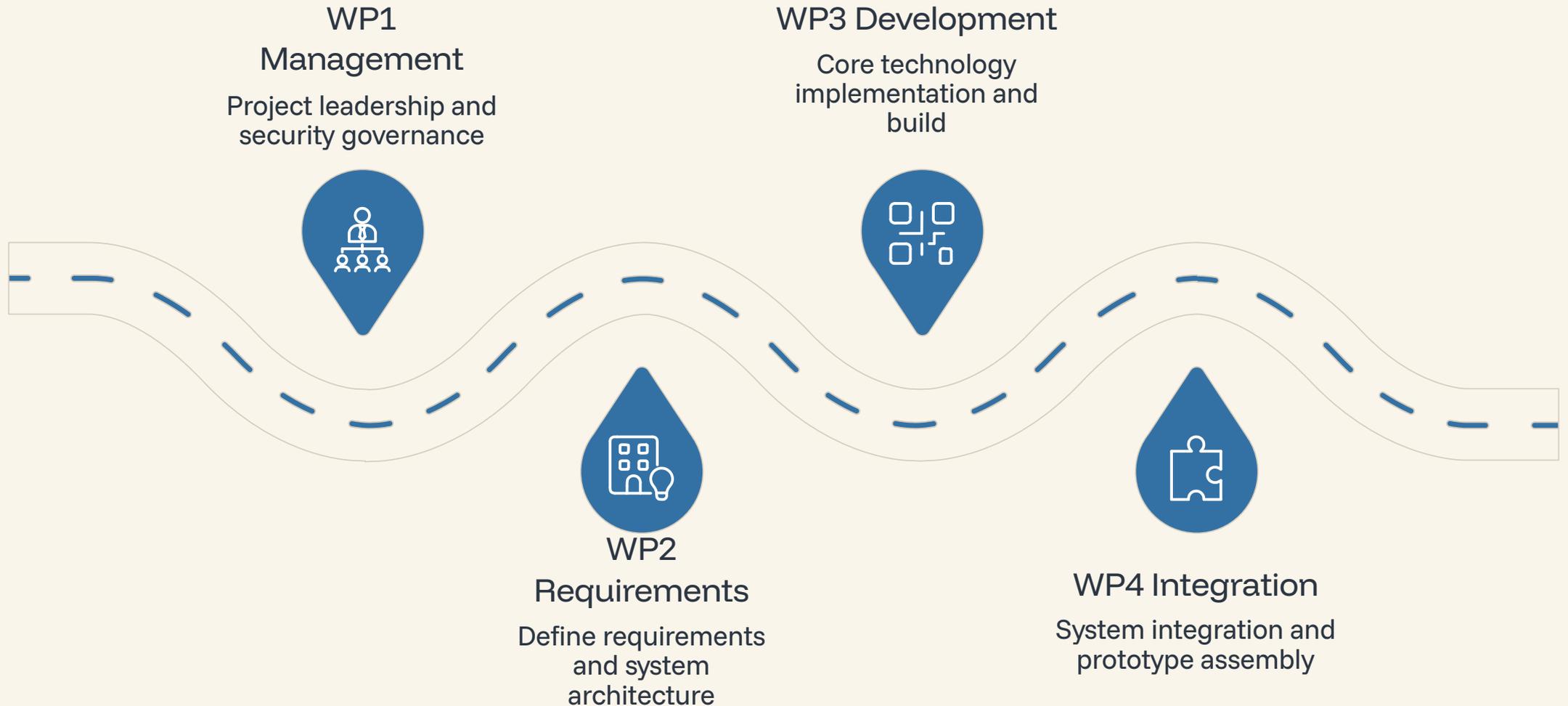
Impact

Contribution to EDTIB autonomy, security of supply, interoperability, and credible exploitation under European control

Implementation

Coherent work plan, governance, risk management, realistic resourcing, and test/validation credibility

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Work Package Structure Evaluators Expect

WP1 Management

Project leadership and security governance

WP3 Development

Core technology implementation and build

WP2 Requirements

Define requirements and system architecture

WP4 Integration

System integration and prototype assembly

Each WP must map directly to topic requirements, eligible activity types, and acceptance criteria. European-controlled exploitation and security-of-supply logic belong in WP6 — not in an administrative annex.

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7 Mistakes Evaluators Frequently Criticise

→ Topic mismatch

Interesting technology without direct alignment to expected outcomes

→ Vague performance claims

No quantified KPIs, baselines, test conditions or success thresholds

→ European control as admin

Weak IP governance, ownership/control and export restriction narrative

→ Exploitation = dissemination

No credible uptake pathway into European-controlled industrial or capability routes

→ Consortium for eligibility

Unclear technical ownership, duplicated roles, token SME participation

Making the Most of 10–11 March

1

Day 1

Call presentations and application guidance — confirm eligibility assumptions and capture evaluation-critical inputs (KPIs, TRL targets, test environments)

2

Day 2

Matchmaking and pitch sessions — use 10–15 minute conversations to validate consortium fit and agree roles, technical ownership and drafting responsibilities

3

Arrive Prepared

Bring a topic shortlist, a one-page capability storyline, and a partner gap list covering integration, test/validation, supply chain and end-user links

Nexuswelt will participate online and is available for structured proposal readiness exchanges during and immediately after the event.

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Proposal-Ready Sequence

01
Translate the topic

Build a requirements sheet: expected outcomes, constraints, mandatory activities, TRL assumptions

02
Draft a capability story

One page: use cases/CONOPS, users, mission constraints, interoperability needs, success conditions

03
Define KPI framework

8–12 KPIs with baselines, targets, methods and demonstration context

04
Engineer European control

IP model, access control, restrictions, security-of-supply approach built into governance and exploitation

05
Mock evaluation & traceability check

Score against award criteria, fix weakest sections; verify topic → objectives → tasks → deliverables → KPIs → exploitation

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How Nexuswelt Supports EDF Applicants

KPI & Evidence Systems

Connecting objectives, deliverables, milestones and demonstrations for evidence-based progress

Impact & Exploitation Planning

EDTIB autonomy, security of supply and European-controlled uptake pathways

Dissemination Planning

Approval-controlled, restriction-aware communication aligned with defence requirements

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