IA Grand Est ENACT

IA Grand Est ENACT

Call for proposals – PHD

Version – Dec 16th 2025

The ENACT AI Cluster is a program led by the University of Lorraine, the University of Strasbourg and their partners (CNRS, Inria, Inserm, CHRU Nancy, Strasbourg University Hospitals) and funded by the French State (via ANR under the France 2030 plan), the Grand Est Region, the Greater Nancy Metropolis, the Eurometropolis of Strasbourg and private companies. Its objective is to make the Grand Est a European leader in education, research and innovation in artificial intelligence. The research component aims, among other goals, to triple by 2030 the number of PhD students in AI across all disciplines, with a particular focus on three areas of excellence (Natural Language Processing and Multimodal LLMs, AI for Engineering and Scientific Discovery, Digital Health), and to increase interdisciplinarity, internationalisation and collaboration between the Lorraine and Strasbourg university sites.

1. Framework and scope of the call

This call aims to allocate half-funded and fully-funded PhD contracts in AI, provided by France 2030 via the ANR, the Grand Est Region, the University of Lorraine (scientific clusters and the Lorraine Excellence Initiative – ISITE) and the University of Strasbourg (doctoral schools and ITIs). The table below summarises the sources and the number of fundings currently identified. The actual number of fundings and their distribution between half-funding and full funding will depend on the nature and quality of the applications submitted, with priority given to requests for half-funding.

This table will be updated once feedback has been received from the various stakeholders.

Sources de financement 2026	Nombre de financements pour 2026
France 2030	5 à 9 financements complets sécables soit jusqu'à 18 demi-financements
Région Grand Est	12 demi-financements (en attente de la décision Région)
Universités	Selon les décisions des ITI/ED/Laboratoires
Total	**12 demi-financements + 6 à 12 financements complets sécables**

***Note**: We are open to any other form of co-funding not listed above. The concerned doctoral schools (EDs) and ITIs providing co-funding will take part in the selection committees (see section 3 of this call).*

Regarding the PhD projects managed by the University of Strasbourg, all projects must be co-funded through a source other than ENACT. Applicants are required to identify a potential co-funding source, which must be specified in the application file.

All disciplinary fields are eligible (Science and Technology, Life and Health Sciences, Humanities and Social Sciences, etc.).

PhD students will be enrolled and affiliated with a doctoral school at the University of Lorraine or the University of Strasbourg. The main PhD supervisor must hold an HDR (habilitation to supervise research) at the start of the PhD and should preferably belong to one of the research entities listed in Appendix 1, namely:

- either be a member of one of the 18 listed laboratories, regardless of employer, even if this employer is not an ENACT partner (AgroParisTech, CentraleSupélec, ENGEES, ICAM, INRAe, INSA Strasbourg),
- or be employed by one of the three other listed entities (CHRU Nancy, Strasbourg University Hospitals, IHU Strasbourg), regardless of the laboratory of affiliation.

However, this call is open to all laboratories from the Lorraine and Strasbourg sites. In order to ensure the successful completion of the research project, collaboration between researchers specialised in AI and/or members of the 18 laboratories listed in Appendix 1 is encouraged.

Joint supervision with a foreign institution and co-supervision with another entity from the Lorraine or Strasbourg site, whether listed in Appendix 1 or not, are strongly encouraged. Proposed supervisors and co-supervisors are encouraged to contact **enact-comite-rt-pers@univ-lorraine.fr**, describing their scientific needs, in order to be connected with members of other research entities able to address those needs and to co-build an interdisciplinary project in response to the call.

Priority will be given to:

- excellence of the candidates;
- requests for half-funding in addition to an existing and proven half-funding (ANR, Europe, company, joint supervision with a foreign institution, etc.), as opposed to full funding, which will be reserved primarily for the Humanities and Social Sciences;

- the three areas of excellence detailed in Appendix 2: 80% of the budget is planned to be allocated to these three areas and 20% to emerging topics or to other structuring areas of excellence for the institutions;
- among the three ENACT areas of excellence, priority will be given to topics related to Axis 1 “NLP and Multimodal LLMs”;
- PhDs under co-supervision between two entities from the Lorraine and/or Strasbourg sites, to which up to 35% of the budget is intended to be allocated;
- PhDs in joint supervision (cotutelle) with a foreign institution, to which up to 20% of the budget is intended to be allocated;
- topics linked to research infrastructures labelled Infra+ or CoRTecS;
- ambitious topics from an environmental perspective, through controlling and reducing computing costs within each thematic area or through final applications linked to the ecological transition.

PhD contracts must start between September and December 2026.

A full funding covers the PhD student’s salary for the first three years of the PhD and €10,000 in operating expenses related to the thesis.

A half-funding covers half of the PhD student’s salary for the first three years of the PhD and €5,000 in operating expenses related to the thesis. Except in special cases, the contract will include a teaching assignment. Projects involving a major engineering effort, such as the creation of a large dataset or the training of a large multimodal model, will also benefit from support from the ENACT AI Engineering Unit currently being set up.

2. Managing institution

MANAGEMENT ON THE LORRAINE SITE

In the case of full funding by France 2030, the managing institution will be the University of Lorraine, except for the ATILF laboratory (managed by the CNRS), to which the funding will be transferred.

In the case of full funding by the University of Lorraine (research clusters, Lorraine Excellence Initiative – ISITE) or a combination of a university-provided half-funding (research cluster, Lorraine Excellence Initiative – ISITE, ANR/European project, industrial contract) and a half-funding from France 2030 or the Grand Est Region, the managing institution will be the University of Lorraine, regardless of the management delegation of the host laboratory.

In the case of a half-funding provided by another ENACT partner institution (Inria, CNRS, Inserm, CHRU Nancy) through its own funds (ANR/European project, industrial contract), the managing institution will be that partner institution, to which the ENACT half-funding will be paid.

In the case of a PhD in joint supervision (cotutelle) co-funded by a foreign institution, the managing institution will be the University of Lorraine. The application must include a commitment from the foreign co-supervisor to fund the remaining part of the PhD and to sign a cotutelle agreement with the University of Lorraine.

In the case of a half-funding provided by a Lorraine-site institution that is not an ENACT partner (AgroParisTech, CentraleSupélec, INRAe), the application must include a commitment from that institution to transfer this half-funding to the University of Lorraine. The managing institution will then be the University of Lorraine. Administrative rules concerning VAT on the transferred funds will be examined on a case-by-case basis.

Co-funding of a PhD by a French institution outside the Lorraine and Strasbourg sites, or by a foreign institution outside a cotutelle arrangement, is not possible within the framework of this call.

MANAGEMENT ON THE STRASBOURG SITE

In the case of full funding by France 2030, the managing institution will be the University of Strasbourg, except for the IGBMC and IVH laboratories (managed by Inserm), to which the funding will be transferred.

In the case of full funding by the University of Strasbourg (doctoral schools, ITIs) or a combination of a university-provided half-funding (doctoral school, ITI, ANR/European project, industrial contract) and a half-funding from France 2030 or the Grand Est Region, the managing institution will be the University of Strasbourg, regardless of the management delegation of the host laboratory.

In the case of a half-funding provided by Inserm (for the IGBMC and IVH laboratories only) or by Inria (ANR/European project, industrial contract), the managing institution will be Inserm or Inria, to which the ENACT half-funding will be paid.

In the case of a PhD in joint supervision (cotutelle) co-funded by a foreign institution, the managing institution will be the University of Strasbourg. The application must include a commitment from the foreign co-supervisor to fund the remaining part of the PhD and to sign a cotutelle agreement with the University of Strasbourg.

In the case of a half-funding provided by a Strasbourg-site institution that is not an ENACT partner (AgroParisTech, ENGEES, ICAM, INRAe, INSA Strasbourg), the application must include a commitment from that institution to transfer this half-funding to the University of Strasbourg. The managing institution will then be the University of Strasbourg. Administrative rules concerning VAT on the transferred funds will be examined on a case-by-case basis.

Co-funding of a PhD by a French institution outside the Lorraine and Strasbourg sites, or by a foreign institution outside a cotutelle arrangement, is not possible within the framework of this call.

3. Timeline

January 30th 2026 : Deadline for submitting all ENACT PhD topics to the following address:

https://enquetes.univ-lorraine.fr/index.php/635271?lang=en

for centralised publication on the website and dissemination through appropriate European channels (Euraxess, etc.). The topics will be shared with the relevant research clusters / doctoral schools / ITIs.

1–17 February: Selection of topics by the ENACT Research and Technology Committee. The list of members of the Research and Technology Committee is provided in the appendix of this call.

End of April : Deadline for selecting candidates and submitting funding applications to ENACT. The applications will be shared with the relevant research clusters / doctoral schools / ITIs.

18–22 May: Interviews and ranking of candidates by one or more ad hoc committees, composed notably of representatives of the ENACT research governance and of the research clusters / doctoral schools / ITIs providing half-funding.

The date of each committee will be announced no later than 15 March 2026.

Committee 1: Interview and ranking of candidates preselected for a full contract combining a half-funding from the AM2I cluster (CRAN, LORIA) or EMPP (LEMTA) or the Lorraine Excellence Initiative – ISITE, and a half-funding from the Grand Est Region or France 2030.

Committee 2: Interview and ranking of candidates preselected for a full contract combining a half-funding from the MSII or SVS doctoral schools or the ITI Healthtech, and a half-funding from the Grand Est Region or France 2030.

Committee 3: Interview of other preselected candidates and final cross-ranking with the reserve lists from Committees 1 and 2.

By default, interviews will be conducted by videoconference for all candidates. They will consist of a presentation by the candidate on their most advanced research work (for example, the work carried out during their Master's internship) and on the PhD project, followed by a discussion with the committee. The presentation support in PPT or PDF format must be sent at least three days before the interview to:

- benjamin.hernaire@univ-lorraine.fr (for University of Lorraine applications)
- mignardot@unistra.fr (for University of Strasbourg applications)

PhD supervisors will be invited to attend the interview by videoconference. Their presence is not compulsory and they will not be allowed to intervene, except to provide factual information at the request of the committee.

The duration of the presentation and discussion and the videoconference link will be communicated to the shortlisted candidates and their supervisors.

Supervisors and candidates will be informed as soon as possible of the ranking established by each committee, which will include a main list and a reserve list.

Candidates on the reserve lists of Committees 1 and 2 will be ranked by Committee 3. Candidates on the main list of any of the three committees will be offered funding. In the event of a refusal,

the first candidate, then the subsequent candidates on the reserve list of Committee 3 will be offered funding.

End of May: Notification of results

4. PhD topic content

The PhD topic will be written in English and will follow the required format. It will include the following information, which will be published:

- University, doctoral school and host laboratory, desired start date
- PhD supervisor and, if applicable, co-supervisor
- PhD title and keywords
- Context: description of the laboratory, the research team and, where relevant, other partners or the project (ANR, Europe, etc.) in which the PhD is embedded
- Scientific project and bibliographic references

The context must include the following sentence: "This PhD offer is provided by the ENACT AI Cluster and its partners. Find all ENACT PhD offers and actions on https://cluster-ia-enact.ai/."

If a half-funding is requested, the source of the applicant's own half-funding must also be indicated in the form but will not be made public. If co-funding from the ITI Healthtech is requested, the application must be submitted on the dedicated platform.

5. Content of the funding application submitted to ENACT

It is the responsibility of the PhD supervisor to ensure that the proposed supervision is eligible under the rules of the doctoral school, particularly in terms of supervision load, and to seek FSD approval when required by the host laboratory.

Each supervisor may support only one candidate or, in exceptional cases where there is a proven risk of withdrawal or refusal by the FSD, two candidates. The application dossier is composed of the following elements:

- PhD topic as described above
- Anticipated ethical risks (human subjects, personal data, hallucinations, bias, environmental impact, misuse, etc.) and measures planned to mitigate them
- Expected scientific, economic and social impact
- Candidate's CV
- Candidate's motivation letter
- Candidate's Bachelor's and Master's transcripts
- FSD status of the candidate: approval obtained, requested, or not required
- Letter from the supervisor of the Master's internship (if completed or started more than 3 months ago) or from a previous project supervisor
- CV of the PhD supervisor and, if applicable, the co-supervisor

- Letter from the PhD supervisor justifying the choice of the candidate, the history of collaboration with the possible co-supervisor, and any other useful information for the committee
- In the case of joint supervision (cotutelle), a commitment from the foreign co-supervisor to fund the remaining part of the PhD and to sign a cotutelle agreement with the University of Lorraine or the University of Strasbourg
- In the case of a half-funding provided by a Lorraine-site or Strasbourg-site institution that is not an ENACT partner, a commitment from that institution to transfer the funding to the University of Lorraine or the University of Strasbourg.

APPENDIX 1: Priority research entities

18 laboratories (regardless of the employing institution):

- AHP
- ATILF
- BETA
- CEIPI Research Laboratory
- CMC
- CRAN
- DRES
- IADI
- ICube
- IECL
- IRMA
- IGBMC
- IJL
- ITM (formerly IVH)
- LEMTA
- LISEC (except LISEC-UHA)
- LORIA
- LPCT

3 other entities (as employer, regardless of the host laboratory):

- CHRU Nancy
- Strasbourg University Hospitals
- IHU Strasbourg

This list corresponds to the research entities mentioned in the application submitted to the AI Clusters call and approved by an international jury of AI experts, and in the final application accepted by the French government. It may evolve during the implementation of ENACT following advice from the scientific committee and validation by the governing board.

APPENDIX 2: Areas of excellence in AI

This appendix provides examples of possible topics within each thematic area. These topics are not exhaustive. Any topic related to these three areas will be considered a priority. In this second call, priority will be given to the axis “NLP and LLMs”.

Natural Language Processing and Multimodal LLMs

- Natural language data in a broad sense: text, knowledge bases, speech, videos, etc.
- Training, updating or tuning large AI models on these data or other data in industry (sensors, discrete flows, robots, etc.), healthcare (imaging, omics, etc.), education (learning traces, etc.) or another sector
- Collection, annotation and generation of corpora for these purposes, with focus on regional or low-resourced languages/cultures, toxic content removal, and personal/confidential attribute protection (anonymization, disentanglement, etc.)
- Training, updating, tuning and inference methods, with focus on the correction of residual biases (preference optimization, output filtering, etc.), the protection of personal/confidential attributes (differential confidentiality, federated learning, etc.), factuality, security and interpretability (formal verification, explainability, neurosymbolic architectures, etc.) and the reduction of the computational footprint (data selection, use of pre-learned models, pruning, quantification, etc.)
- New model architectures exploiting multimodality or surpassing Transformer
- Study of the theoretical and linguistic properties of models (scaling laws, probing, etc.) and their use for various applications
- Ethical and legal framework and associated psychological, sociological, anthropological and economic considerations.

AI for Engineering and Scientific Discovery

- Includes both the design of new AI methods adapted to engineering and scientific discovery problems and new uses of already available AI methods
- AI for the discovery of biological pathways and molecules for therapeutic purposes • AI for the discovery of molecules and materials for the decarbonization of industry, energy, buildings, etc.
- AI for the analysis of scientific literature, the formulation of hypotheses, the planning and analysis of experimental results and other research tasks in any discipline (history, geography, management, etc.)
- AI for the design and optimization of industrial products and processes, taking into account speed, cost, logistics, maintenance, customer needs, etc.
- New model architectures ensuring the realism, precision, stability, robustness, interpretability and explainability of results: symbolic regression, integration of physical models, optimization algorithms, etc.
- Holistic AI integrating all research, engineering, innovation, production, and application
- Ethical and legal framework and psychological, sociological, anthropological and economic considerations associated with the deployment of AI in industry

Digital Health

- Training, update and tuning of multimodal AI integrating data from several stages of the patient journey (medical reports, pre-, intra- and post-operative images and videos, genomics, histopathology, physiological signals, electrocardiograms, tool/sensor signals, etc.) and public data (environmental data, manuals, forums, social media, scientific articles, etc.) or focused on a specific stage
- Federated learning that is computationally efficient, robust to non-i.i.d. data, and customizable
- Integration of biophysical models or knowledge on disease progression, anatomy deformation, or interactions between robotic tools and biological tissues
- Use for various tasks at different stages of the patient journey (interactive discussion on symptoms, risk stratification, image recording, design of patient-specific prostheses, diagnosis, preoperative planning, minimally invasive treatment, postoperative follow-up, etc.) and for clinical research (discovery of new relationships between factors and symptoms, between treatments and results…)
- Evaluation of clinical benefits, particularly for cardiorespiratory and digestive pathologies and inflammatory bowel diseases
- Evaluation of ease of use: saving time and knowledge, cognitive assistance, etc.
- Ethical and legal framework and psychological, sociological, anthropological and economic considerations associated with the deployment of AI in healthcare.

APPENDIX 3: Composition of the ENACT Research and Technology Committee (tabular form?)

The RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE is composed of representatives of the members of the ENACT CLUSTER. They were identified by the ENACT Steering Committee, in coordination with the Scientific Coordinator of the PROGRAM.

- Alain HEHN, Vice-President for Research, University of Lorraine
- Rémi BARILLON, Vice-President for Research, University of Strasbourg
- Laurent CHAPUT, ENACT Chair
- Claire GARDENT, ENACT Chair
- Serena IVALDI, ENACT Chair
- Nicolas GIRERD, ENACT Chair
- Yannick PRIVAT, ENACT Chair
- Dragos HORVATH, ENACT Chair
- Nicolas PADOY, ENACT Chair
- Stefano BIANCHINI, ENACT Chair
- Jean-Marc DELTRON, ENACT Chair
- Isabelle QUEINNEC, CNRS
- Catherine SCHUSTER, INSERM
- Viviane MARTIN, CHRU Nancy
- Sarah HUSTACHE, Strasbourg University Hospitals