

Common Challenges – Shared Solutions

Call no. **2018-01** (Call-ID)

EEA and Norway Grants Fund for Regional Cooperation

CALL FOR PROPOSALS – CONCEPT NOTE PHASE

Publication date: 24.01.2018

Introduction

The Financial Mechanism Office (“the FMO”) announces call no. 2017-2 seeking the submission of proposals for grants for transnational projects under the EEA and Norway Grants Fund for Regional Cooperation (“the Fund”).

The Fund operates on the basis of calls designed and launched by the Donor States Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein with support from their secretariat the FMO. The fund operator, a consortium consisting of Ecorys Polska and JCP, assists the FMO in implementing the Fund. The project selection will follow a two-step procedure, in which this call is the first step. Based on the assessment of submitted concept notes, shortlisted applicants may continue to the second step.

Projects funded are intended to contribute towards the overall objectives of the EEA and Norway Grants¹:

- Reducing economic and social disparities in the European Economic Area; and
- Strengthening relations of the Donor States Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein with 15 Beneficiary States² in Northern, Central and Southern Europe.

EEA and Norway Grants Fund for Regional Cooperation

The Fund supports projects addressing common European challenges through regional cross-border and transnational cooperation in the form of knowledge sharing, exchange of good practice and capacity building across the priority sectors of the EEA and Norway Grants 2014-2021. The total amount available for projects is € 31.89 million, of which 15 million is made available for this call for proposals.

The projects supported must be regional cross-border or transnational in nature and involve multiple partners and activities in different countries. Eligible entities must apply as a consortium, consisting of entities from a minimum of three countries³. Please see chapter 2 for further information on eligibility.

The following documents constitute the legally binding framework which applies to the Fund:

- *Protocol 38c on the EEA Financial Mechanism (2014-2021), article 7⁴*; and
- *Agreement between the Kingdom of Norway and the European Union on a Norwegian Financial Mechanism for the period 2014-2021, article 7.*

¹ <http://www.eeagrants.org/bluebook>

² Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia

³ Eligible countries are the 15 Beneficiary States, and the selected non-EEA countries Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Russia, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine

⁴ Protocol 38C/Agreement Article 7.1: The global funds shall contribute to achieving the objectives of the EEA and Norwegian Financial Mechanisms 2014-2021 as defined in Article 1; and Article 7.3; the fund for Regional Cooperation shall be made available for regional cooperation across the priority sectors listed in Article 3, in particular knowledge sharing, policy exchange for best practices and institution building. This part of the fund shall be made available to projects involving Beneficiary States and neighbouring third countries. Projects shall involve at least three countries, including at least two Beneficiary States. The EFTA States can participate as partners.

All projects and activities funded shall be based on the common values of:

- Respect for human dignity;
- Freedom;
- Democracy;
- Equality;
- Rule of law; and
- Respect for human rights, including the rights of people belonging to minorities.

All projects and activities supported by the Fund shall follow the principles of good governance; they shall be participatory and inclusive, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient. There shall be zero-tolerance towards corruption. All projects and activities supported by the Fund shall be in line with the principles of sustainable development, long-term economic growth, social cohesion and environmental protection.

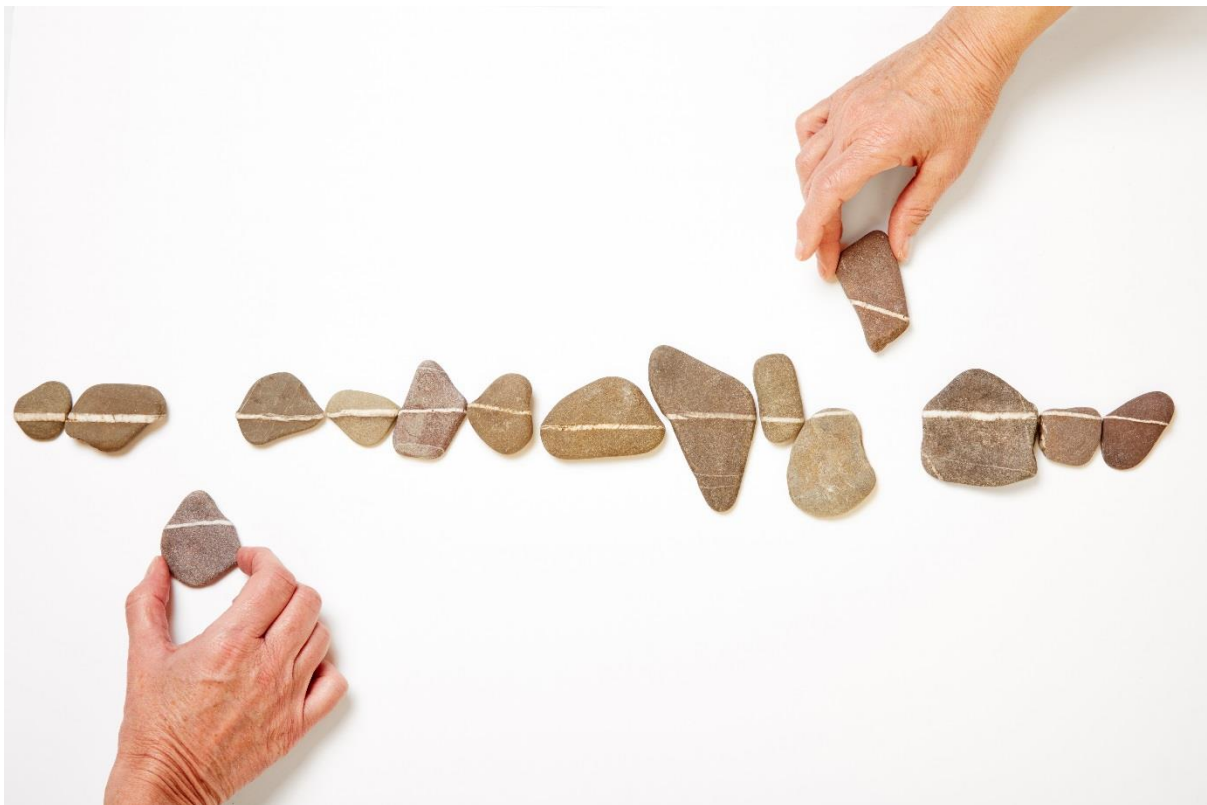


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1. FOCUS OF THE CALL

1.1 Background

The EEA and Norway Grants are contributing to reducing social and economic disparities in Europe and strengthening bilateral relations between the Donor States Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein and 15 Beneficiary States in Northern, Central and Southern Europe.

In recognition of the growing importance of regional cross-border and transnational cooperation in Europe, the Donor States have for the EEA and Norwegian Financial Mechanisms 2014-2021 increased their funding to promote such collaboration. Whereas the majority of EEA and Norway Grants funding is tailor-made to national initiatives and bilateral cooperation between the Donor States and the Beneficiary States, the EEA and Norway Grants Fund for Regional Cooperation targets projects strengthening regional cross-border and transnational cooperation between the Donor States, the Beneficiary States and ten non-EU Member States.

In this call for proposals, regional cross-border cooperation is defined as cooperation between neighbouring countries on shared challenges while transnational cooperation is defined as cooperation between European countries – neighbouring or not - on common European challenges⁵. The EEA and Norway Grants Fund for Regional Cooperation strengthens the European cooperation component within the priority sectors of the Grants. To further underline the importance of involving all countries or areas affected by shared challenges, 10 third countries are also eligible for funding.

Through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF), and the European Neighbourhood Policy⁶ (the European Neighbourhood Instrument 2014-2020) the EU has made funding available to address shared issues within Europe⁷. The Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region⁸ and the Strategy for the Danube Region⁹ (EC 2010) are examples of regional cross-border cooperation.

With this call for proposals the EEA and Norway Grants Fund for Regional Cooperation recognises regional cross-border and transnational cooperation as a key driver to find shared solutions to common challenges. Funding will be allocated to support inclusive dialogue and the strengthening of transnational/regional networks, knowledge sharing and policy exchange to accelerate innovation; job creation; the development of sustainable cooperation structures between the business sector, public sector, civil sector and academia; and engagements contributing to and enhancing effectiveness and efficiency in policy development and responses to common European challenges.

⁵ For an example of such transnational cooperation please see <https://wwf.fi/en/lwfg/>. To protect the endangered Lesser White-fronted Goose their wintering and breeding grounds and the flyway between them must be safeguarded. This involves cooperation between countries as diverse as Greece, Bulgaria, Hungary, Finland and Norway.

⁶ https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/european-neighbourhood-policy-enp_en

⁷ <http://ec.europa.eu/esf/home.jsp>

⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/cooperate/baltic/pdf/2010_baltic.pdf

⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/nl/policy/cooperation/macro-regional-strategies/danube. The countries along the Danube river, for instance, have a common interest in this waterway. Other challenges related to the river are considered transnational and involve countries in different parts of Europe

1.2 Principles and priorities

Within this call for proposals, regional cross-border and transnational project ideas focusing on *soft measures* like knowledge-sharing, the exchange of good practice and capacity building within all priority areas of the EEA and Norway Grants will be considered for funding (see Annex and footnote no. 1). The Fund seeks *innovative* project ideas that propose new solutions to common challenges.

When evaluating the proposals contribution to the above objective, the Fund will take into account:

- 1) geographical spread of projects;
- 2) sustainability;
- 3) establishment of cross sectoral partnerships (public, private, academia, NGOs etc.);
- 4) pilots with possibility for up-scaling by EU programmes;
- 5) innovative and cost-efficient initiatives;
- 6) tangible results with good visibility and impact.

The added value of this Fund compared to other initiatives of the EEA and Norway Grants is its *regional and transnational* focus. The main idea is to support entities across Europe pooling their efforts to find new ways of dealing with common concerns. Activities, outputs, outcomes and the impact of the Fund shall therefore be regional cross-border or transnational in nature and the added value of this dimension should be clearly visible. The projects could be complementary to activities implemented in the context of EU cross-border and transnational cooperation.

Project partners may cooperate in one of two ways:

1. Regional cross-border cooperation between eligible countries (focusing on broader regional challenges)
2. Transnational cooperation between eligible countries (focusing on common European challenges)

As indicated under *1.1. Background* above, EU funding is available for the EU Member States on regional cooperation. This call seeks to *complement* existing EU funding. Projects within areas that commonly do not receive EU funding are therefore particularly welcome.

All projects supported under this Fund need to follow a results and risk management approach. Projects need to define a) their proposed activities and their expected outputs, b) why they think those activities are going to be successful and c) provide any evidence they have to support this intervention logic.

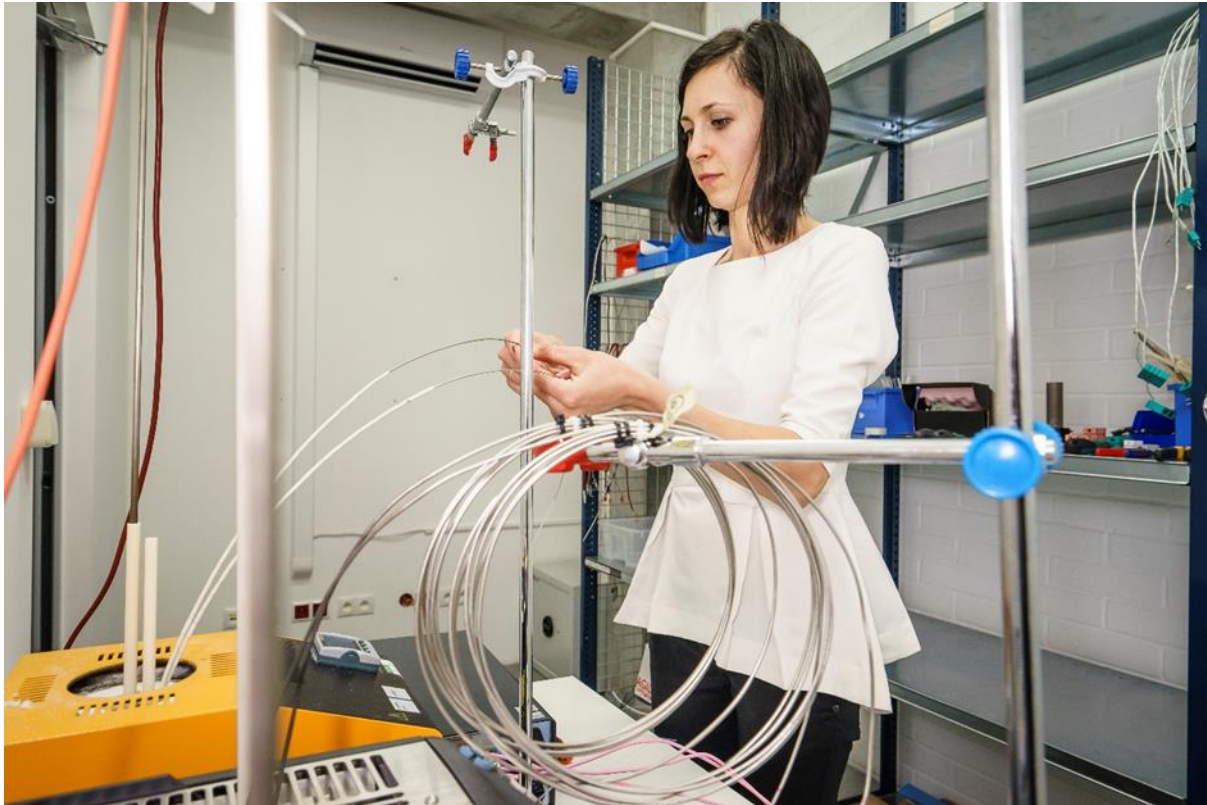
1.3 Priority sectors

This call for transnational projects includes all the five priority sectors of the EEA and Norway Grants:

- Innovation, Research, Education and Competitiveness;
- Social Inclusion, Youth Employment and Poverty Reduction;
- Environment, Energy, Climate Change and Low Carbon Economy;

- Culture, Civil Society, Good Governance and Fundamental Rights and Freedoms;
- Justice and Home Affairs

Each of these priority sectors is described in the annex. All priority sectors imply networking and close cooperation with entities in other eligible countries, and can also include expertise partners established in a Donor State, in a non-eligible EU Member State or an international organisation, if relevant. Priority sectors may be combined.



2. ELIGIBLE CONSORTIA

Projects shall involve entities from at least three countries, including at least two Beneficiary States¹⁰. Each project must include one lead partner and at least two beneficiary partners of which at least one must be from a Beneficiary State.

- Eligible lead partner: any eligible entity established in an EEA and Norway Grants Beneficiary State;
- Eligible beneficiary partner: any eligible entity established in an EEA and Norway Grants Beneficiary State and the following countries: Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Russia, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine;
- Expertise partners can be any eligible entity established in a Donor State, in a non-eligible EU Member State or international organisations.

Project partners are all the consortium members, including; the lead partner, the beneficiary partners and any expertise partner(s).

Entities established in one of the 15 Beneficiary States can apply for funding and perform the tasks of lead partner¹¹ in the project consortia. Entities established in one of the 15 Beneficiary States or in the following non-EEA third countries: Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Russia, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine can join the consortia as beneficiary partners.

There is no limit on the maximum number of beneficiary partners. The establishment of project consortia with more members than the minimum is considered favourable. However, the size of the partnership must be duly justified in order to reflect the specific outcome of the project as well as ensure that the transnational cooperation is manageable.

Eligible project partners may be entities, public or private, commercial or non-commercial and non-governmental organisations and academia established as legal persons, including but not limited to:

- Municipalities, organisations owned or partly owned by municipalities, associations of municipalities;
- Regions, organisations owned or partly owned by regions; associations of regions;
- Organisational units of central government, organisations partly funded by central government units, state enterprises, state organisations;
- Civil society organisations, non-profit organisations, social enterprises, interest associations of legal persons, foundations and endowment funds;
- Companies;
- Cooperatives (manufacturing, housing, consumer);
- Social partners (trade unions, sector associations, employer associations, chambers of commerce and industry).

¹⁰ Beneficiary States of the EEA and Norway Grants are Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia,

¹¹ See definitions in Chapter 8. The FMC may decide that an entity established in a Donor State or an international organisation may take on the role of lead partner, provided that the other requirements for the composition of consortia are satisfied.

Natural persons are not eligible consortium members. Consortium members must be directly responsible for the implementation of the project for which they are seeking a grant.

2.1 Support of projects with expertise partners

Projects under the Fund are intended to benefit identified target groups within the 15 Beneficiary States and the 10 third countries Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Russia, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine. The consortia may invite expertise partners to support the projects by bringing added value by way of sharing expertise, experience, know-how and contribute to capacity building.

Bilateral relations between Beneficiary and Donor States shall be encouraged in line with the overall objective of the EEA and Norway Grants. The inclusion of relevant expertise partners from the Donor States is considered advantageous.

The concept note shall list the expertise partners to be involved in the project and describe their relevant work achievements and why they are considered necessary to reach the objectives of the project.

Target groups or other stakeholders in the countries of the expertise partners cannot benefit directly from the Fund. However, expertise partners may expect to benefit from project involvement through professional cooperation, promoting extended and strengthened European networking and the mutual development and exchange of information and good practice.

Independent experts from the Donor States may perform the role of expertise partners provided they are organised as a registered business owned by one individual where the owner is personally responsible for any debts or liabilities incurred by the business and pays personal income tax on the business profits.

The same expertise partner may participate in multiple project consortia.

2.2 Role and provisions for project consortia

The purpose of regional cross-border and transnational partnerships is to ensure the close mutual cooperation of various types of organisations with different skills, knowledge and experiences. Through such cooperation common European solutions can be found. Multinational partners shall also help to ensure project sustainability.

A partnership is a contractual relationship between three or more entities, which is based on shared responsibility for project implementation. Partners are jointly involved in project preparation and implementation during the drawing-up of the concept note and later the full proposal, the implementation of the project, and the completion of the project. The project partners work together in a multinational partnership to reach the objectives which are to be realised through the implementation of the project. All project partners must be actively involved in, and effectively contributing to, the implementation of the project, i.e. the partnership must be substantiated and sustainable within the consortium.

The lead partner has the following role in the consortium:

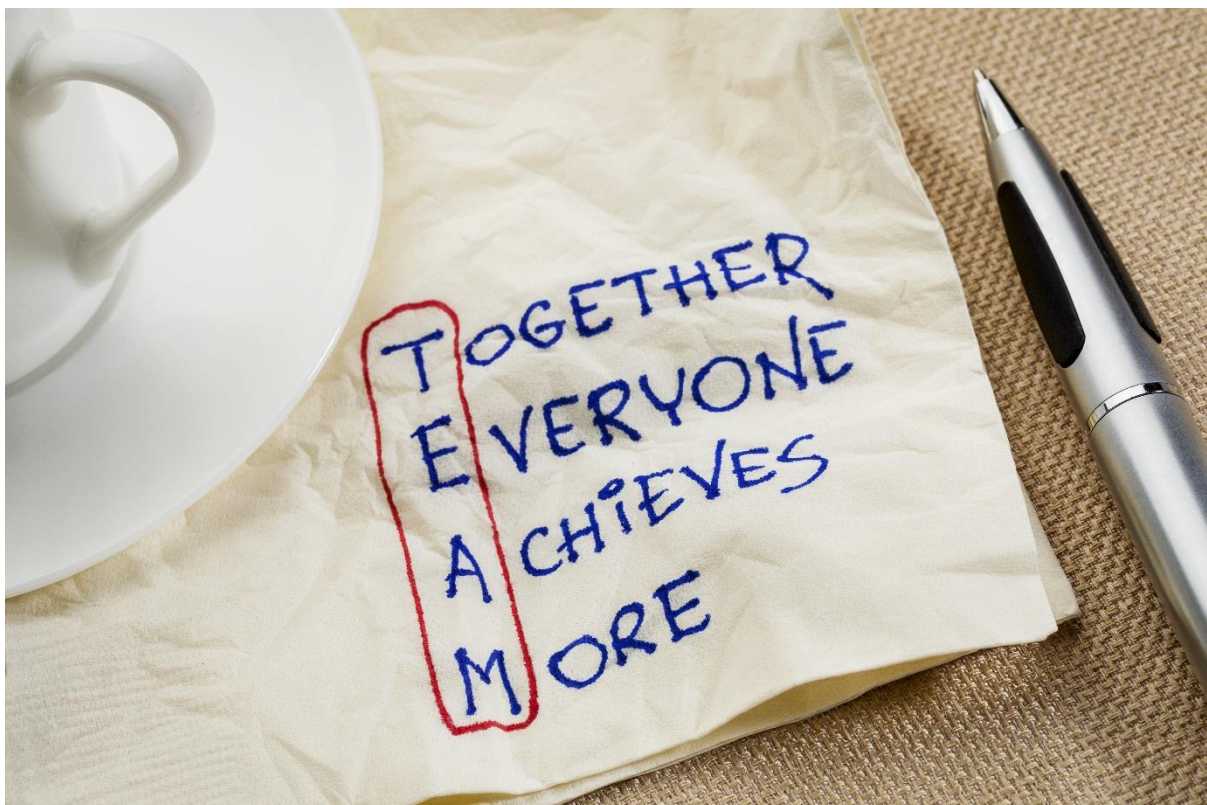
- It will be responsible for submitting the concept note and later the full proposal;

- It will enter into the contractual relationship with the fund operator (project contract);
- It will be responsible for the contact with the fund operator on behalf of the consortium;
- It will be responsible for entering into the contractual relationship with the other beneficiary partners as well as expertise partners within the framework of a Partnership Agreement;
- It will receive and distribute the project grant to the other members of the consortium;
- It will bear the responsibility to return any amounts due by any member of the consortium; and
- It will be responsible for the reporting of project performance and results to the fund operator.

The nature of legal relationships between the lead partner and the other partners must not rest upon service provision; i.e. the cooperation is not of a supplier-customer character and the consortium must not be of a commercial character.

During the project development phase the project partners must make clear how they will undertake the management of the project, how work tasks will be allocated, which measures they will take to ensure that high quality standards are applied by all consortium partners, how they will monitor the achievement of objectives and how they will take appropriate corrective measures if and when necessary during the project period. The lead partner shall sign a Partnership Agreement with all project partners (both beneficiary and expertise partners).

All contractual relationships between the lead partner, beneficiary partners and expertise partner(s), their roles in the projects, scope of activities, responsibility and definition of mutual rights and obligations during the project implementation shall be addressed in their Partnership Agreement.



3. PROJECT DURATION

The project duration must be taken into account in the development of the concept note. Long-term project funding could be considered for example where pilots are being developed, for projects focused on innovative processes and development of new methodologies, or in the case of projects involving capacity building. Long-term funding may also be needed for larger-scale projects.

The final date for eligibility of expenditures for projects is **30th April 2024 at the latest**.

Unless a later date is provided in the decision to approve the project grant or in the project contract, expenditure incurred shall be eligible as of the date on which the Financial Mechanism Committee decides to award the project grant.

The first and final dates of eligibility of each project shall be stated in the project contract for that project.

4. FINANCIAL PROVISIONS

The available budget under this call is EUR 15 million.

The amount of grant assistance applied for within a project shall not be less than EUR 1 million.

There is no maximum grant amount per project. The Financial Mechanism Committee reserves the right not to award all the available funds, to re-publish this call or to re-allocate the funds to subsequent calls or other activities.

4.1 Project co-financing

The project consortium is required to provide project co-financing. The project grant rate shall be determined with reference to the status of the individual consortium members, as follows:

- Non-governmental organisations: up to 90% of their eligible expenditures (up to 50% of the required co-financing may take the form of in-kind contributions in the form of voluntary work)
- Project partners with the status of universities and research organisations: up to 90% of their eligible expenditures
- Any expertise partners from the Donor States¹²: up to 100% of their eligible expenditures
- Other entities: up to 85% of their eligible expenditures

4.2 Budget

The indicative project budget is part of the concept note (see Chapters 6 and 7) and must be drawn up in euros.

4.3 No-profit principle

The grant may not have the purpose or effect of producing profit within the context of the project.

Any **net revenue** generated as a direct consequence of the project must be deducted from the amount of total eligible expenditure of the project.

4.4 General criteria for eligibility of expenditure

Eligible expenditures of projects are those **actually** incurred within the project by the project partners, which meet the following criteria:

- (a) They are incurred between the first and final dates of eligibility of a project as specified in the project contract;

¹² Strengthening the bilateral relations between Iceland, Lichtenstein and Norway, and the Beneficiary States is one of the two overall objectives of the EEA and Norway Grants as specified in Article 1.1 of Protocol 38c to the EEA Agreement on the EEA Financial Mechanism 2014-2021 and Article 1.1 of the Agreement between the Kingdom of Norway and the European Union on the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2014-2021.

- (b) They are connected with the subject of the project contract and they are indicated in the detailed budget of the project;
- (c) They are proportionate and necessary for the implementation of the project;
- (d) They must be used for the sole purpose of achieving the objective(s) of the project and its expected outcome(s), in a manner consistent with the principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness;
- (e) They are identifiable and verifiable, in particular through being recorded in the accounting records of the project partner and determined according to the applicable accounting standards and generally accepted accounting principles; and
- (f) They comply with the requirements of applicable tax and social legislation.

Expenditures are considered to have been incurred when the cost has been invoiced, paid and the subject matter delivered (in case of goods) or performed (in case of services and works). Depreciation of equipment is considered to have been incurred when they are recorded on the accounts of the project partner.

4.5 Eligible direct expenditure

The eligible direct expenditures for a project are those expenditures which are identified by the project partners, in accordance with their accounting principles and usual internal rules, as specific expenditures directly linked to the implementation of the project and which can therefore be booked to it directly.

In particular, the following categories of direct expenditures are eligible provided that they satisfy the general criteria for eligibility of expenditure:

- The cost of staff assigned to the project, comprising actual salaries plus social security contributions and other statutory costs included in the remuneration, provided that these costs are in line with the partner's usual policy on remuneration. The corresponding salary costs of staff of national administrations are eligible to the extent that they relate to the cost of activities which the relevant public authority would not carry out if the project concerned were not undertaken;
- Travel expenses and related subsistence allowances of staff taking part in the project, provided that these costs are in line with the partner's usual practices on travel. Any accommodation allowances must not exceed the per diem rates published on the http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/funding/about-calls-tender/procedures-and-practical-guide-prag/diems_en;
- Costs of consumables and supplies, provided that they are identifiable and assigned to the project;
- Cost of equipment provided that it is depreciated in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles applicable to the project partner and generally accepted for items of the same kind. Only the portion of the depreciation corresponding to the duration of the project and the rate of actual use for the purposes of the project may be eligible. In case the project partner determines that the equipment is an integral and necessary component for achieving the outcomes of the project, the entire purchase price may exceptionally be eligible;
- Costs arising directly from the requirements imposed by the project contract (report by an independent auditor, cost of financial guarantees etc.);

- Costs entailed by other contracts awarded by a project partner for the purposes of carrying out the project;
- Non-recoverable value added tax (VAT).

4.6 Eligible indirect costs

A flat rate of 15% of the total eligible staff costs of the project is eligible under indirect costs, representing the general administrative costs which can be regarded as chargeable to the project.

Where in-kind contribution in the form of voluntary work constitutes part of the project co-financing and the voluntary work is carried out under the responsibility of the relevant project partner, the value of that voluntary work shall be taken into account when calculating the indirect costs.

4.7 Ineligible costs

The following costs shall not be considered eligible:

- (a) Interest on debt, debt service charges and late payment charges;
- (b) Charges for financial transactions and other purely financial costs, except costs specifically required by the applicable law and costs of financial services imposed by the project contract;
- (c) Costs related to purchase of land or real estate;
- (d) Provisions for losses or potential future liabilities;
- (e) Exchange rate losses;
- (f) Recoverable VAT;
- (g) Costs that are covered by other sources;
- (h) Fines, penalties and costs of litigation, except where litigation is an integral and necessary component for achieving the outcomes of the project; and
- (i) Excessive or reckless expenditure.

4.8 Procurement

Applicable national and European Union law on public procurement shall be complied with at any level in the implementation of the projects. The award of contracts (including the procedures prior to the award) and the terms and conditions of such contracts shall, in line with the principle of proportionality, comply with best economic practices, including accountability, allow a full and fair competition between potential providers and ensure the optimal use of resources from the Fund. The highest ethical standards, as well as the avoidance of any conflict of interests, shall be observed during the procurement and execution of contracts. Detailed rules on the award of procurement contracts shall be set out in the project contract.

4.9 State aid

Any support under the Fund shall comply with the procedural and substantive state aid rules applicable at the time when the support is granted. Potential state aid implications will be examined at the time of full proposal review and may result in rejection or recommendations for changes to the full proposal.

4.10 Currency for financial reporting and payments

Payments of the grant shall be made in euro. Financial reports must be drawn in euro.

5. INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES

Requirements on effective communication and dissemination of results in projects will be inserted in the project contracts to be concluded between the fund operator and the lead partners.

These requirements include, but are not limited to:

- The implementation of project level communication plans, with clear measures to ensure visibility of the EEA and Norway Grants Fund for Regional Cooperation and public awareness of the projects. The lead partners shall ensure that information on the projects is available to the widest possible audience and across the countries involved in the implementation of the projects as well as Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway;
- A clear acknowledgement of the contribution of Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway through the EEA and Norway Grants in all publications and activities for which the Fund is used. This includes to give prominence to the name of the three Donor States and logos of the EEA and Norway Grants on all publications, posters, webpages and other products and infrastructure, as well as any events realised under the projects;
- A responsibility to establish dedicated websites in English for the projects. These websites shall include information about the projects, their progress, achievements and results, relevant photos and/or videos, contact information, a clear reference to the EEA and Norway Grants Fund for as well as general information about the three Donor States and the EEA and Norway Grants;
- The obligation to organise at least one major and two minor annual information activities on progress, achievements and results in the projects, such as a seminar or a conference with stakeholders, a press conference or press event; and
- The obligation to arrange a launch activity/event as well as a closing activity/event for the projects.

Costs related to information and communication activities should be included in the estimated budget of the concept note.



6. EVALUATION AND SELECTION OF APPLICATIONS

This call follows a two-step evaluation procedure. In the first step, only concept notes shall be submitted for evaluation. Successful applicants from the first step will be invited to submit a full proposal.

6.1 Concept note phase

No later than **01.07.2018**, applicants are invited to submit a project concept note briefly describing the project idea, project activities and outputs, the members of the project consortium and a tentative budget.

The concept notes will be reviewed by the fund operator and the FMO against the following criteria:

- ADMINISTRATIVE criteria: The concept note is drawn up in English, and project costs are presented in EUR. The concept note is submitted before the deadline in the prescribed format;
- ELIGIBILITY criteria: The applicants are eligible entities and their proposed consortium set-up is in line with the requirements of the call; the budget proposal is within the parameters set for the call;
- SELECTION criteria, see table below: The concept note needs to take into consideration the following Donor standards;

Selection criteria
The concept note demonstrates a strong understanding of the thematic issues to be addressed
The concept note outlines a clear, innovative and sound strategy to meet the objectives of the call
The concept note clearly outlines the added benefits of a multinational project consortium
Composition of the consortium (number of countries/beneficiary partners involved, inclusion of third countries, involvement of expertise partners is considered favourable)
Involvement of expertise partners from the Donor States
Sustainability, donor visibility, relevance and impact
The concept note demonstrates a clear logical line from project idea to quality results

Only applicants that pass the administrative and eligibility criteria will be evaluated against the selection criteria. Applicants that are found not to pass the administrative or eligibility criteria have a right to appeal at this stage. Appeals shall be submitted to the fund operator, within 10 calendar days of the notification. Only shortlisted applicants will be invited to continue to the second phase.

The FMO may, in order to ensure a geographical spread, targeted use of the resources available and avoid duplication, exclude any concept note at this stage.

The Donor States may refuse any application at any stage of the application process without further explanation and reserve the right to withdraw or reduce the budget of this call for proposal regardless

of the quality or number of applications received, and adjust, revise or revoke the call for proposals based on the prerogative of Donor State priorities.

The Donor States may, when awarding a grant, impose any conditions they deem necessary in the interests of the Fund. Such conditions may apply, *inter alia*, to the project activities, consortium members and financial parameters.

The FMO offers no guarantees that a concept note that has fulfilled the criteria for stage 1 will be selected for the second phase of the call procedure.

6.2 Second phase submission of a complete application

Shortlisted applicants will be invited to submit a full proposal before a final deadline. All required application modalities will be provided to the shortlisted applicants at this stage, including the administrative, eligibility, exclusion, as well as selection criteria – comprising budget assessment – for the awarding of project proposals.

In this phase the FMO may organise events to support the further development of project concept notes in line with the objectives of the Fund. Limited funding may be made available to shortlisted applicants for the purpose of such project preparation. Information about such events will be published on the webpage of the Fund.

7. FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE PREPARATION OF CONCEPT NOTES

Concept notes must be in line with the principles and priorities set out in Chapter 1. Applicants are invited to present concept notes on projects that are transnational and regional cross-border in nature and follow a results-based management approach.

The project idea must be formulated **concisely, clearly and accurately** and be clearly linked to the priority areas of this call and include the expected outcome of the project. Vague concept notes will not be considered. The concept note must clearly describe the rationale behind the activities proposed, drawing on research, studies, observations and own experience within the field. The template for the concept note is annexed to this call.

The elements outlined in the concept note may not be substantially modified by the applicant in the full proposal (step 2). The consortium members included in the concept note must also be included in the full proposal, however additional partners may be proposed. The project budget may not substantially vary from the initial estimate.

Eligible consortia may submit a maximum of one concept note and consortium members may not participate in other project consortia under this call. However, expertise partners may participate in multiple projects.

Concept notes must be drawn up in English. The budget estimate must be presented in EUR.

All Applicants should be registered in the EGREG system (the registration is mandatory for Lead Partners) at <http://www.egregsystem.info/regionalcooperation> .

The concept note shall be submitted electronically via the fund operator's system (EGREG) by **01.07.2018 (12:00 noon Brussels time)**. No modification to the concept note is allowed once the deadline for submission has elapsed.

Answers to the preparation of concept notes will be provided during the period the call is active. Technical issues are solved via the EGREG help desk (helpdesk@egregsystem.info). Other questions may be sent electronically by e-mail to the following account: eeagrants@ecorys.com. Answers will be published on the webpage of the Fund, <http://eeagrants.org/regionalcooperation>

Applicants may also seek information in one of the info hubs listed at the fund operator's website. Applicants have no legal entitlement to the award of a grant.

Indicative timetable

No	Stages	Dates
1	Deadline for submitting concept notes	01.07.2018.
2	Notification of applicants of the results of the assessment of the concept notes	15.10.2018
3	Deadline for submitting full proposals	15.12.2018
4	Notification on selection of projects	01.03.2019

7.1 Further information

EEA and Norway Grants Fund for Regional Cooperation website:

<http://eeagrants.org/regionalcooperation>

ECORYS Polska and JCP (fund operator), tel +48 22 339 45 40, website: www.ecorys.pl/eeagrants

- **East Hub Information Unit** (Warsaw): +48 22 339 45 40
- **West Hub Information Unit** (Reggio Emilia): +39 05 22 501 157
- **South Hub Information Unit** (Sofia): +35 92 491 75 18

EEA and Norway Grants website: <http://eeagrants.org> and <http://norwaygrants.org>

8. DEFINITIONS

Beneficiary partner

A beneficiary partner is an eligible entity established in any of the 15 Beneficiary States of the EEA and Norway Grants (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Cyprus, Malta and Portugal) or in Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Russia, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine, that together with the lead partner, other beneficiary partners and any expertise partners form the transnational project consortium that will carry out a project.

Beneficiary State

The 15 Beneficiary States of the EEA and Norway Grants are Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.

Donor State, Donors

The Donor States are Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein.

Eligible country

The eligible countries for this call for proposals are Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Russia, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine.

Eligible entity

An eligible entity is an entity established as a legal person in one of the eligible countries that may apply for funding under this call. See Chapter 2 for an overview of eligible entities.

Expertise partner

An expertise partner is any entity established as a legal person in a Donor State, in a non-eligible EU Member State or an international organisation that may contribute with expertise relevant to a project under this call. The same expertise partners may participate in multiple projects within the Fund.

Financial Mechanism Committee

The Financial Mechanism Committee (FMC) is the decision-making body for the EEA Grants. The committee consists of representatives of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway. The FMC draws up policy and guidelines, approves each programme allocation and ensures monitoring, control, and evaluation of the Grants. The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the decision-making body for the Norway Grants.

Financial Mechanism Office

The Financial Mechanism Office (FMO) is the Brussels-based secretariat for the Grants. The FMO is affiliated to the European Free Trade Association, but reports to the Foreign Ministries of Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway. The FMO also serves as a contact point for the Beneficiary States.

Fund operator

The fund operator, the consortium Ecorys Polska/JCP, takes on the administrative and technical tasks related to implementation of the Fund. Its responsibilities, amongst others, are disseminating calls for proposals, project contracting, verification of payment claims, and implementing the audit and monitoring functions. The fund operator follows up implementation and maintains day-to-day contact with the project partners. The fund operator is responsible for the administrative and eligibility checks of projects for the FMO's review and ranking.

Lead partner

During the project implementation one partner entity, based in one of the 15 EEA and Norway Grants Beneficiary States, is to be named lead partner in the consortium. The lead partner has a specific role in the consortium, see Chapter 2. In exceptional cases FMC may allow a lead partner from a Donor State or from an international organisation.



Annex

1. Priority sector: Innovation, Research, Education and Competitiveness

Under this support area the Fund seeks projects that focus on growth by supporting the development of the knowledge economy. Sustainable growth is promoted through funding to strengthen the link between education and training systems and the labour market. The development of a socially inclusive labour market will be supported through combating youth unemployment, facilitating the participation of women and promoting social dialogue. The added value of the funding under this support area lies in the opportunities it offers for strategic piloting and testing of innovative approaches and for international cooperation and the exchange of knowledge and experiences.

Focus areas:

1. Business Development, Innovation and SMEs
2. Research
3. Education, Scholarships, Apprenticeships and Youth Entrepreneurship
4. Work-life Balance
5. Social Dialogue – Decent Work

2. Priority sector: Social Inclusion, Youth Employment and Poverty Reduction

Under this support area the Fund seeks projects that focus on sustainable inclusive growth and future prosperity. Such goals rely on finding a balance between economic progress and social advancement. The support area promotes well-functioning societies by supporting social inclusion and empowerment of vulnerable groups, equal access to education, employment and health care, and capable and responsible institutions. The added value of this support area is its contribution to breaking the cycle of disadvantage by supporting early interventions, by investing in prevention and boosting systemic change, and by encouraging pilot projects in the area of social innovation.

Focus areas:

6. European Public Health Challenges
7. Roma Inclusion and Empowerment
8. Children and Youth at Risk
9. Youth Participation in the Labour Market
10. Local Development and Poverty Reduction

3. Priority sector: Environment, Energy, Climate Change and Low Carbon Economy

Under this area the Fund seeks projects that focus on resource-efficient and sustainable use of our natural capital, reduced vulnerability to climate change and a push towards a less carbon intensive and more energy secure economy. These are key factors for economic and social cohesion in Europe.

The support area aims to ensure good environmental status of our ecosystems, timely adaptation and mitigation to climate change and increased use of renewable energy.

Focus areas:

- 11. Environment and Ecosystems
- 12. Renewable Energy, Energy Efficiency, Energy Security
- 13. Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

4. Priority sector: Culture, Civil Society, Good Governance and Fundamental Rights

Under this area the Fund seeks projects that focus on our common moral obligation to safeguard individual dignity. The support area contributes to upholding fundamental rights and democratic freedoms. This is achieved through strengthening active citizenship, empowering vulnerable groups and enhancing the role of civil society. The aim is reinforced by support for activities aimed at cultural dialogue and awareness of diversity.

Focus areas:

- 14. Cultural Entrepreneurship, Cultural Heritage and Cultural Cooperation
- 15. Civil Society
- 16. Good Governance, Accountable Institutions, Transparency
- 17. Human Rights – National Implementation

5. Priority sector: Justice and Home Affairs

Under this area the Fund seeks projects that focus on strengthening European citizens' confidence in their governments' ability to ensure civil rights, equal treatment and protection. Lack of public trust in the judiciary is widespread mainly due to corruption, excessive length of proceedings and chronic non-enforcement of judicial decisions. Furthermore, the influx of irregular migrants remains a challenge for Europe. Domestic and gender-based violence remain endemic throughout Europe to huge economic and social cost. Man-made and natural disasters are increasing both in frequency and intensity, and investments in disaster risk reduction can reduce or prevent loss of life and property, and reap vast economic benefits.

Focus areas:

- 18. Asylum and Migration
- 19. Correctional Services and Pre-trial Detention
- 20. International Police Cooperation and Combating Crime
- 21. Effectiveness and Efficiency of the Judicial System, Strengthening Rule of Law
- 22. Domestic and Gender-based Violence
- 23. Disaster Prevention and Preparedness