



Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Second Call for Proposals

Specifications and Requirements for the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Second Call for Proposals

22.03.2023

1. Preamble

This document outlines the terms and conditions that apply specifically to the second call for proposals launched by the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE (CE) Programme. More general information on rules and requirements to be observed when applying for Interreg CE funding can be found in the [programme manual](#). **The knowledge of both documents is essential for developing and submitting a project proposal.**

This document is part of the “Application Package for the Second Call for Proposals”, which is available at this [link](#). The application package consists of:

- a. Terms of Reference (ToR) for the call (this document);
- b. Offline template of the application form, providing guidance on how to fill-in the application form in Jems;
- c. Lead partner declaration template;
- d. Project partner declaration template;
- e. Simplified financial statement (applicable only to private lead applicants).

Further information and guidance on the application process can be found in video tutorials and other support measures developed by the programme with the aim of supporting applicants in designing and submitting their project proposals (see also § 10 in this respect).

2. Objectives and Focus of the Call

It is the mission of the Interreg CE Programme to

“Bring regions and cities together beyond borders to find fitting solutions for their citizens, in a fair and equal way everywhere”¹

¹ Chapter 1.2 of the Interreg Programme CENTRAL EUROPE 2021-2027, available at www.interreg-central.eu/documents.



To this end, the second call for proposals intends to select high quality transnational projects, in which relevant organisations cooperate to make regions more resilient to common challenges that know no borders and which cannot be solved alone.

Within the second call, project proposals can be submitted under **all four programme priorities** and **nine specific objectives**. The description of programme priorities and objectives, together with exemplary actions, is provided for in chapter 2 of the adopted Interreg Programme (IP) document, available at www.interreg-central.eu/documents, as well as in chapter I.2.2 of the [programme manual](#).

3. Budget of the Call

The programme will allocate around 60m EUR from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to the second call for proposals. An indicative ERDF allocation to the four programme priorities is presented in table 1. When selecting projects to be funded, such allocation may be adapted by the monitoring committee (MC) according to programme needs.

Table 1: Indicative ERDF allocation per priority

| Programme priority | Indicative ERDF allocation (m EUR) |
|---|------------------------------------|
| 1. Cooperating for a smarter central Europe | 18 |
| 2. Cooperating for a greener central Europe | 30 |
| 3. Cooperating for a better-connected central Europe | 6 |
| 4. Improving governance for cooperation in central Europe | 6 |
| Total | 60 |

The ERDF co-financing rate is 80%. Beneficiaries shall ensure the necessary contribution to finance their activities.

The ERDF co-financing may be reduced in case of State aid relevance of project activities, in compliance with relevant rules on the matter (see also chapter I.4.4.3 of the [programme manual](#)). Moreover, in the specific case of ERDF granted to partners as State aid under the General Block Exemption Regulation, and where VAT (Value-Added Tax) is recoverable under national VAT legislation, eligible costs incurred on a real-cost basis may be reimbursed net of VAT.

4. Project Features

The second call for proposals aims at selecting projects that have the following characteristics:

- A partnership ranging indicatively from 5 to 12 partners;
- A budget ranging indicatively from 1,2 to 1,9 m EUR of ERDF;
- An indicative project duration up to 30 months.

Project proposals with longer or shorter duration, as well as with smaller or bigger partnerships or budgets may also be selected for funding. In any case, duration and budget shall reflect the project scope and the planned activities.



5. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants for the second call for proposals are:

- National, regional and local public bodies²;
- Private institutions, including private companies, having legal personality;
- International organisations acting under the national law of an EU Member State;
- International organisations acting under international law, with restrictions.

Any of the eligible applicants, with the exception of international organisations acting under international law, can take the lead partner role as long as it is located in the programme area or it qualifies as “assimilated partner” (for the definition of assimilated partner, please refer to chapter I.3.1.1 of the [programme manual](#)).

Private lead applicants must hold minimum financial capacity requirements in order to be eligible as lead partners. Project proposals submitted by private lead applicants not meeting the necessary financial capacity criteria will be rejected.

6. Transnationality of Partnerships

As minimum requirement, the partnership must involve:

- At least three financing partners;
- From at least three countries; and
- At least two of the partners located in Interreg CE regions.

A European Group of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)³ is eligible as sole beneficiary provided that the above-mentioned minimum requirements are complied with. For an EGTC to be eligible as sole beneficiary, it must be established in one of the Interreg CE Member States.

Applicants located outside the programme area but within the EU can also apply for funding as project partners, however such partners shall bring a clear benefit to the programme area. Their involvement is considered as exceptional and must be duly justified.

Applicants can also be located outside the EU, but they will not receive ERDF funding from the Interreg CE Programme.

7. Selection of Proposals

Project proposals will be selected for funding following a quality assessment of the received applications based on a standardised procedure, to safeguard the principles of transparency and equal treatment.

² Including “Public equivalent bodies”, i.e. bodies governed by public law as defined in Article 2(1) of Directive 2014/24/EU on public procurement fall under this category, as well as including EGTCs established in accordance with Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 as amended.

³ Established in accordance with Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 as amended.



Project proposals which successfully pass a **formal/administrative compliance check** and, in case of private lead applicants, a **lead applicant financial capacity check** (see chapter II.4.2 of the [programme manual](#)), enter the quality assessment.

For the second call for proposals, the quality assessment is carried out in **two phases**, with a first phase aimed at excluding from the selection process those proposals lacking of relevance for the programme (relevance filter) and a second phase assessing all details of the proposals (full assessment).



Relevance filter

The **relevance filter assessment** is performed **exclusively according to information included in the following parts** of the application form:

Part A - Project identification

- A.1 Project identification
- A.2 Project summary
- A.5 Project outputs and result overview

Part B - Project partners (for each partner)

- B.1.1 Partner identity
- B.1.6 Partner motivation, expertise and contribution
(only first textbox on thematic competences and experiences)

Part C - Project description

- C.1 Project overall objective
 - C.2.1 What are the territorial challenge(s) that will be tackled by your project?
 - C.2.2 How does the project tackle identified challenges and needs and what is new about the approach of your project?
 - C.2.3 Why is transnational cooperation needed to achieve the project objectives and results?
- C.3 Project partnership
- C.4 Project work plan
(only the descriptions of the project specific objectives and outputs under each work-package)
- C.5 Project results



The relevance filter focuses on particular aspects of the strategic assessment criteria ‘relevance’ and ‘partnership’, as highlighted in table 3 below (text underlined).

Proposals not showing a sufficient quality when assessed against the above aspects of the two strategic criteria are rejected. The decision for passing project proposals to the full assessment or for their rejection is taken by the programme MC.

Full assessment

The **full assessment** of project proposals is performed against **the full set** of strategic and operational criteria and guiding questions (i.e. also those applicable to the relevance filter) outlined in table 3. Proposals are assessed using the scoring scale as in the following table.

Table 2: Scoring scale used for the full assessment of proposals

| Appraisal | Explanation |
|------------------|--|
| 5 “excellent” | The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. The provided information is clear and coherent. Any shortcomings are minor. |
| 4 “good” | The proposal addresses the criterion well, but a small number of shortcomings is present. |
| 3 “adequate” | The proposal addresses the criterion to a sufficient level, but some aspects have not been met fully or are not explained in full clarity or detail. |
| 2 “insufficient” | The proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are serious shortcomings and/or the provided information is of low quality. |
| 1 “poor” | The criterion is inadequately addressed by the proposal, or the required information is missing. |

Selection criteria and selection process

The quality assessment is carried out against **selection criteria** grouped in two categories, **strategic** (“Relevance” and “Partnership”) and **operational** (“Implementation”), as also recalled in chapter II.4.5 of the [programme manual](#) and as further detailed in the following table.



Table 3: Selection criteria and guiding questions applicable to the second call for proposals (guiding questions - or parts of it - applied for the relevance filter are underlined)

| Criteria | | Guiding questions |
|--------------------|-----------------|--|
| STRATEGIC | Relevance | <p>Intervention logic and transnationality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How relevant is the <u>project proposal in relation to the achievement of the targeted programme specific objective and the expected result at territorial level?</u> <u>Is the importance and added value of transnational cooperation for the topic addressed clearly demonstrated?</u> <u>Is the project intervention logic (i.e. project specific objectives, outputs and expected results) clearly defined and consistent?</u> <p>Policy and territorial relevance, horizontal principles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How relevant is the project proposal for the common territorial challenges, joint assets and needs of the CE programme area, and in particular for the specific situation of the participating regions? How clearly does the project proposal contribute to the relevant policy framework at different levels? How well does the proposal contribute to horizontal principles (i.e. equal opportunities and non-discrimination, gender equality, sustainable development including environment protection) and integrate them in the project design? <p>Innovativeness and synergies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the innovativeness of the project proposal clearly demonstrated? How far does it go beyond existing practices in the sector and/or participating regions? How well does the project proposal build on available knowledge and make use of synergies with other projects or initiatives? |
| | Partner ship | <p>Partnership composition and competences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How relevant is the <u>partnership composition in order to respond to the identified common territorial challenges and needs? Does it demonstrate sufficient competences and capacities to implement the planned activities in the participating regions, considering the necessary governance levels, and achieve the expected results?</u> Does the lead applicant have sufficient experience and capacity to manage a transnational cooperation project or is there a clear plan to acquire missing competences through e.g. additional staff or sub-contracting? Do partners have a clear role and matching competences to fulfil their tasks? In case of partners outside the programme area, is the added value of their participation duly justified? <p>Transnational cooperation approach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How well does the <u>partnership reflect the transnational cooperation dimension and is it geographically balanced?</u> Are partners actively involved for a joint implementation of activities? |
| OPERATIONAL | Implemen tation | <p>Methodology and work plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the methodology suitable to obtain the planned outputs and results? Are the work plan and timing of activities, deliverables and outputs realistic, consistent and transparent? In case of investments, are they clearly relevant for reaching the project objectives? Do they have a clear transnational and pilot character? Are communication activities planned in the work plan and are they relevant for achieving communication objectives? How well are target groups (and other stakeholders including associated partners) actively involved in project activities? How well does the project proposal conceptualise the ownership/durability, long lasting effects and transferability of outputs and results? Does the management approach show good potential to secure a sound project management, coordination and risk mitigation? |
| | | <p>Budget</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the total budget demonstrate value for money? Is there coherence between project design and budget? Are the financial contributions of the partners balanced and do they reflect partner responsibilities? |



In order to help applicants designing their project proposals, a complimentary **self-assessment tool** reflecting the assessment criteria and guiding questions is available at this [link](#).

Parallel to the full assessment, a **State aid assessment** of proposals is conducted in order to identify the State aid relevance of project proposals as well as the concerned partners.

Project proposals will be selected by the programme MC at the level of each priority axis, on the basis of the results of the quality assessment.

Applicants will be notified about the outcome of the selection process after the MC decisions on relevance filter and the full assessment of the submitted proposals.

For further information on the whole assessment process, please refer to chapter II.4 of the [programme manual](#).

8. Contracting of Approved Projects

After a project proposal is selected for funding by the programme MC and, if applicable, after having successfully fulfilled the conditions for approval set forth by the MC, a subsidy contract between the MA and the lead partner will be concluded.

The subsidy contract constitutes the legal framework for the implementation of the project. It confirms the final ERDF commitment to the project, it sets out the conditions for support and it provides implementing arrangements. The most recent version of the approved application form is an integral part of the subsidy contract. The subsidy contract model is available at www.interreg-central.eu/documents.

The LP shall establish legal arrangements for relations with all project partners in a partnership agreement. The partnership agreement includes provisions that, inter alia, guarantee the sound financial management of the funds allocated to the project, including the arrangements for a recovery of amounts unduly paid. The partnership agreement model is available at www.interreg-central.eu/documents.

9. Submission of Proposals and Deadline

The Interreg CE second call for proposals is organised in a “one-step” procedure.

Project proposals must be submitted in English language, only through the web-based programme joint electronic monitoring system (Jems) available at <https://jems.interreg-central.eu>.

Project proposals must be submitted by the lead applicant at the latest by:

| |
|--------------------------------|
| 17.05.2023 at 13:00 CET |
|--------------------------------|

The application package contains also an offline template of the application form (for information purposes only), which includes additional guidance for filling out the various sections.

The expected timeline for the MC decision on funding will be published on the programme website www.interreg-central.eu after the submission deadline.



10. Support to Applicants

The programme offers the following support measures and tools to help applicants in submitting quality proposals:

- Applicant community for project idea exchanges and matchmaking
- Video explainers and tutorials
- Webinars on a broad variety of topics
- Individual consultations for lead applicants
- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
- Helpdesks for content, finance and technical support
- National support by national contact points (NCPs)
- Tools for self-assessment and drafting

Please read chapter II.3 of the [programme manual](#) for more information and visit the “apply” section of the programme [website](#) for regular updates and further details regarding all support measures.