

Fact Sheet 18 - Application Assessment Process

	Valid from	Valid to	Comments to change
Version 1	16.11.2021		

Core message: The programme will use a combination of 1-step (small-scale projects) and 2-step application procedures (regular projects), when selecting projects for funding. All applications are assessed by the Joint Secretariat according to a set of standard procedures and assessment criteria. The programme's Monitoring Committee then decides which projects should receive funding. This fact sheet explains how your application will be assessed.

Background

The programme will be implemented through regular and small-scale projects. Regular projects are selected by making use of a 2-step application procedure. Applicants first submit an expression of interest (EOI) and, if successful, submit a full application. In contrast, small-scale projects are selected in a 1-step process, i.e. they are approved or rejected on the basis of one application, rather than two.

All expressions of interest (EOIs), full applications and small-scale project applications submitted by the deadline of a call for proposals are assessed following a standard procedure. The Joint Secretariat (JS) carries out the assessment using standard eligibility and assessment checklists. This results in a recommendation, which is presented to the programme's Monitoring Committee. This committee makes the final decision on whether or not a project should receive funding from the programme¹.

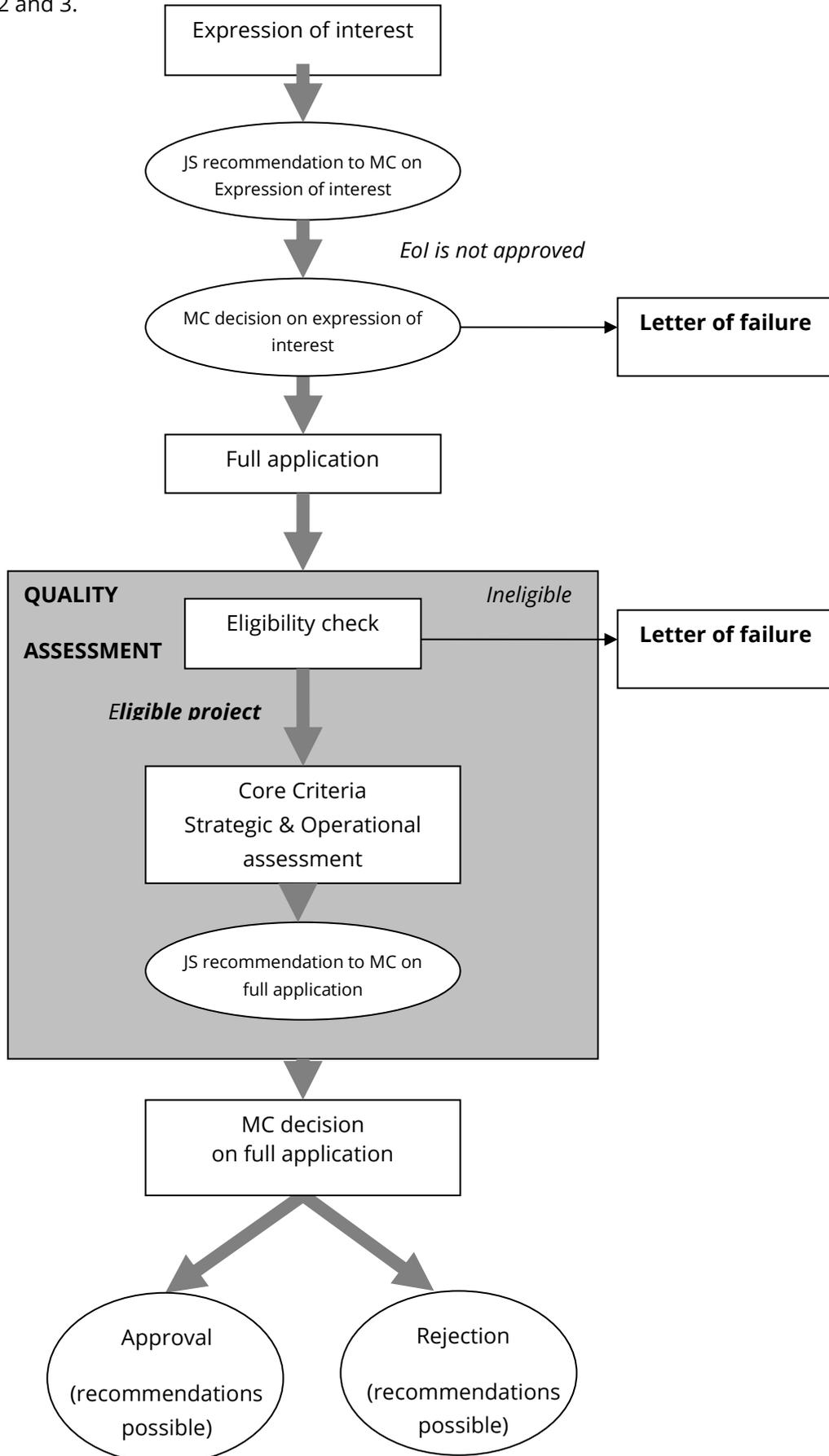
If non-essential information is missing when an application is submitted, the JS will indicate this to the Monitoring Committee and request follow-up from the project if the application is approved. However, if the application is incomplete or lacks important supporting documentation, the application will not be assessed.

The lead partner of all projects considered by the Monitoring Committee will be informed of the committee's decision directly after the meeting.

This fact sheet proceeds as follows. First, the full 2-step application procedure is illustrated below and both steps are described in the guidance. Second, the application process for small-scale

¹ If an applicant believes that a decision made by the Monitoring Committee is unfair, they can make use of the complaints procedure established for the North Sea Programme.

projects is illustrated and described. The assessment criteria for the three types are described in annexes 1, 2 and 3.



Guidance – Expressions of interest (Step 1)

The aim of the expression of interest is:

- To provide a relatively easy way for inexperienced partners and/or very innovative ideas to approach the programme and get a realistic assessment of whether funding is likely to be granted.
- To allow the partner countries in the programme to make requests for modifications or additions to project ideas and thereby reduce the number of rejections or conditional approvals of full applications.

The expression of interest is a condensed form of the full application, which focuses primarily on the content of the project. All expressions of interest receive a formal assessment by the Joint Secretariat. They are assessed using a subset of the full assessment criteria (see EoI Assessment Criteria as Annex 1 to this Fact Sheet). For each of the assessments categories, the expression of interest is assessed as Strong, Sufficient, Weak or Insufficient. No expression of interest will receive a recommendation to move on to a full application if it is assessed as Insufficient in any category. The 6 categories used are:

- Project Relevance
- Cooperation Character
- Project intervention logic²
- Partnership Relevance
- Work plan
- Budget

Expressions of interest which are approved by the monitoring committee will have to develop a full application for decision at one of the following two calls for full applications. Rejected expressions of interest will receive a letter explaining the main reasons for rejection. It is possible to re-apply with a modified expression of interest taking into account the comments by the monitoring committee.

Guidance – Full application (Step 2)

The quality assessment is made up of two parts: The eligibility check and the strategic & operational assessment.

- The eligibility check ensures that the submitted application complies with all basic programme rules and relevant European regulations. It assesses whether it is possible for the programme to fund the application. Only projects that have passed the eligibility check are given a full assessment and considered by the Monitoring Committee for approval or rejection.
- The strategic assessment criteria determine the extent of the project's contribution to programme objectives and results by addressing joint needs.
- The operational assessment criteria assess the viability and feasibility of the proposed project, as well as its value for money.

² Project's contribution to programme objectives, results and outputs

If the project fails the eligibility check, the lead partner will receive a letter explaining why the application is ineligible. The lead partner of the application will be informed about the outcome of the eligibility check. At the same time, the national authorities in the lead partner's country will check that the project is not acting against any national policy. The individual national authorities will check the legal status and other national specific requirements are fulfilled by the partner(s) participating from their country (e.g. capacity check).

Every project is given a qualitative assessment, which focuses on the project's individual merits. Each part of the assessment links to a specific part of the application so that both assessors and reviewers know exactly which parts of the application to read in order to carry out the assessment (see full application assessment criteria in Annex 2 to this fact sheet).

The possible rating for each part of the assessment is:

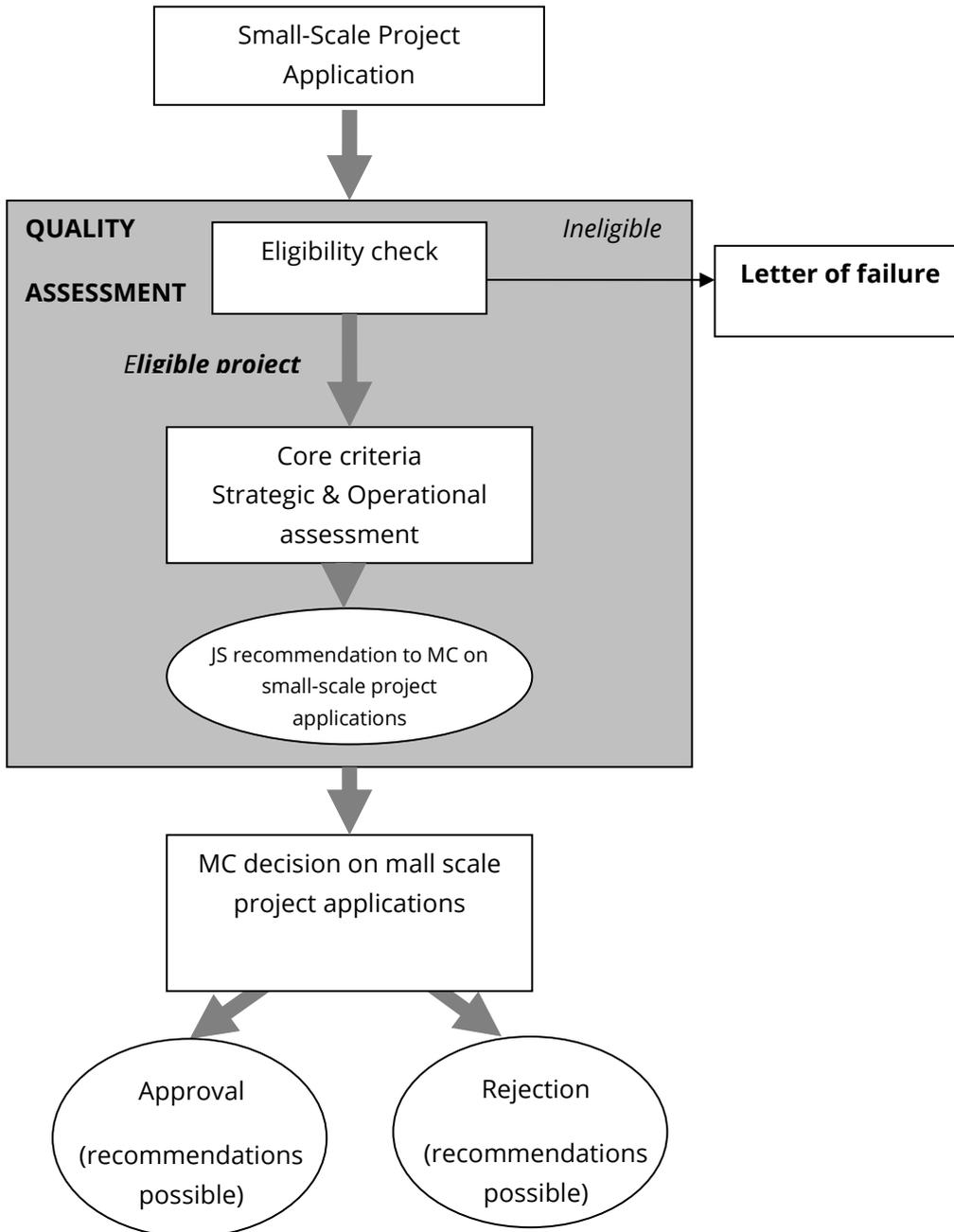
- **Strong** – the application addresses the criterion well, although it is possible that some small improvements could be made. The answer gives clear information on all important areas.
- **Sufficient** – the application broadly addresses the criterion, but there are areas that could be strengthened. There are several areas where detail could be improved or the information is unclear.
- **Weak** – the application is missing important details or only fulfils the criterion to a minimum level. The issue is not sufficient to reject the application by itself, but there is clear room for improvement.
- **Insufficient** – the application fails to address the criterion adequately and/or the information provided is not in line with programme requirements. The answer does not correctly address the question asked.

If a project is assessed as being insufficient on one of the strategic or operational assessment questions, the project is recommended for rejection. An rating of 'sufficient' in all categories does not guarantee a recommendation for approval, as the final recommendation will take an overall view of the project and its fit in the programme at the time of application. It is important to note that the JS makes recommendations and that it is the Monitoring Committee that makes the final decisions for approval. The guidance for each call for proposals will set out any issues of particular importance for the call in question.

Guidance – Small-scale Projects Application

Small-scale projects will be selected in a '1-step application procedure'. This means that small-scale projects will have a separate application form, slightly different from the regular projects' 'full application'.

The 1-step application procedure is illustrated below.



The quality assessment process is identical to the assessment process of the full applications. During the quality assessment there will be a slightly different assessment checklist corresponding the small-scale project application form (see Small-scale Project applications Assessment Criteria as Annex 3 to this fact sheet).

Annex 1

Expression of Interest – Assessment checklist

Strategic assessment criteria

Topic	Assessment question	Assessment will be based primarily on the responses to the following questions	Section in the full application form	Rating (Dropdown list: <i>Strong, Sufficient, Weak, Insufficient</i>)
Project relevance	How well is a need for the project justified?	The project addresses common territorial challenges of the programme or a joint asset of the programme area - there is a real need for the project (well justified, reasonable, well explained).	A.2 'Project summary'	[DROPDOWN]
	To what extent will the project	The project overall objective clearly contributes to the achievement of the programme priority specific objective.	C.1	[DROPDOWN]

	contribute to the achievement of programme's objectives and indicators?	The project contributes to (a) spotlight theme(s) identified by the programme. FOR INFORMATION ONLY! YES/NO question in the assessment drop down.	C.1	
		The project outputs clearly link to programme output indicators and their contribution to programme targets is sufficient.	C.2.1 Output tables in work packages, C.4	
		Project's contribution to programme result indicators is realistic and sufficient.	C.3, C.4	
		The project demonstrates new solutions that go beyond the existing practice in the sector/programme area/participating countries or adapts and implements already developed solutions.	A.2	
Cooperation character	What added value does the cooperation bring?	The importance of cooperation beyond borders for the topic addressed is clearly demonstrated	A.2	[DROPDOWN]
		The results cannot (or only to some extent) be achieved without cooperation.	A.2	
		There is a clear benefit from cooperating for the project partners / target groups / project area / programme area.	A.2, B (Project partnership)	
		Work package objectives are specific, realistic and achievable.	C.2	[DROPDOWN]

Project intervention logic	To what extent is project intervention logic plausible?	Proposed project outputs are needed to achieve project specific objectives.	C.2	
		Project outputs and results that contribute to programme indicators are realistic (it is possible to achieve them with given resources – i.e. time, partners, budget - and they are realistic based on the quantification provided).	C.2, C.3, C.4, D	
		Project outputs are durable (the proposal is expected to provide a significant and durable contribution to solving the challenges targeted) – if not, it is justified.	A.2	[DROPDOWN]
Partnership relevance	To what extent is the partnership composition relevant for the proposed project?	The project involves the relevant actors needed to address the territorial challenge/joint asset and the objectives specified.	A.3, B	[DROPDOWN]
		Considering the project’s objectives the project partnership: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - is balanced with respect to the levels, sectors, territory - consists of partners that complement each other 	B	
		All partners play a defined role in the partnership and the territory benefits from this cooperation.	B	

Operational assessment criteria

Topic	Assessment question	Assessment will be based primarily on the responses to the following questions	Section in the full application form	Rating (Dropdown list: <i>Strong, Sufficient, Weak, Insufficient</i>)
Work plan	To what extent is the work plan realistic, consistent and coherent?	Proposed activities and deliverables are relevant and should lead to planned outputs and results.	C.2, C.3	[DROPDOWN]
		The importance and transnational relevance of investments is clear. (if applicable).	C.2	
Communication	To what extent are communication activities appropriate to reach the relevant target groups and stakeholders?	The communication objectives are relevant and are expected to contribute to project specific objectives.	C.2	[DROPDOWN]
		Communication activities (and deliverables) are appropriate to reach the relevant target groups and stakeholders.	C.2	

Budget	To what extent is the project budget in line with the principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness?	<p>The principle of economy concerns minimising costs. The resources used by the project partnership to carry out its activities should be made available in due time, in appropriate quantity and quality, and at the best price.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The budget allocated to staff and external expertise is in line with the project content and the costs are realistic. - Sufficient and reasonable resources are planned to ensure project implementation. 	D.2 & E.3	[DROPDOWN]
		<p>The principle of efficiency concerns getting the most from the available resources. It is concerned with the relationship between resources employed and outputs delivered in terms of quantity, quality and timing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The need for engaging external expertise is justified and the costs seem realistic. - Financial allocation per cost category is in line with the work plan. - If applicable, the distribution of the budget per period is in line with the work plan. - The application of lump sums and unit costs is appropriate and in line with the programme rules. 		
		<p>The principle of effectiveness concerns meeting the project objectives and achieving the intended results.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The available information in the budget is transparent and sufficient. On that basis, the project budget 		

		<p>appears proportionate to the proposed work plan, project outputs and project's contribution to programme indicators aimed for.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sufficient and reasonable resources are planned for investments and equipment purchases (if applicable) and their costs are realistic. 		
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Annex 2

Full application – Assessment checklist

Strategic assessment criteria

Topic	Assessment question	Assessment will be based primarily on the responses to the following questions	Section in the full application form	Rating (Dropdown list: <i>Strong, Sufficient, Weak, Insufficient</i>)
Project relevance	How well is a need for the project justified?	The project addresses common territorial challenges of the programme or a joint asset of the programme area - there is a real need for the project (well justified, reasonable, well explained).	C.2.1 and C.2.2 (A.2 'Project summary' can be used throughout the strategic assessment of	[DROPDOWN]

			the applications)	
		The project clearly contributes to a wider strategy on one or more policy levels (EU / national / regional).	AF C.2.5	
To what extent will the project contribute to the achievement of programme's objectives and indicators?		The project overall objective clearly contributes to the achievement of the programme priority specific objective.	C.1	[DROPDOWN]
		The project contributes to (a) spotlight theme(s) identified by the programme. FOR INFORMATION ONLY! YES/NO question in the assessment drop down.	C.1	
		The project outputs clearly link to programme output indicators and their contribution to programme targets is sufficient.	C.4 Output tables in work packages	
		Project's contribution to programme result indicators is realistic and sufficient.	C.5	
How does the project build on existing practices?		The project makes use of available knowledge and builds on existing results and practices.	B.1.6, C.2.6	[DROPDOWN]
		The project tries to avoid overlaps and replications; there is evolution of ideas.	C.2.2	

		The project demonstrates new solutions that go beyond the existing practice in the sector/programme area/participating countries or adapts and implements already developed solutions.	C.2.2	
Cooperation character	What added value does the cooperation bring?	The importance of cooperation beyond borders for the topic addressed is clearly demonstrated	C.2.3	[DROPDOWN]
		The results cannot (or only to some extent) be achieved without cooperation.	C.2.3	
		There is a clear benefit from cooperating for the project partners / target groups / project area / programme area.	C.2.3	
Project intervention logic	To what extent is project intervention logic plausible?	Work package objectives are specific, realistic and achievable.	C.4	[DROPDOWN]
		Proposed project outputs are needed to achieve project specific objectives.	C.4	
		Project outputs and results that contribute to programme indicators are realistic (it is possible to achieve them with given resources – i.e. time, partners, budget - and they are realistic based on the quantification provided).	C.4, C.5, C.6, D	

	To what extent will project outputs have an impact beyond project life time?	Project outputs are durable (the proposal is expected to provide a significant and durable contribution to solving the challenges targeted) – if not, it is justified.	C.8.2	[DROPDOWN]
		Project main outputs are applicable and replicable by organisations/regions/countries not represented in the current partnership (transferability) – if not, it is justified.	C.8.3	
Partnership relevance	To what extent is the partnership composition relevant for the proposed project?	The project involves the relevant actors needed to address the territorial challenge/joint asset and the objectives specified.	C.3	[DROPDOWN]
		Considering the project's objectives the project partnership: - is balanced with respect to the levels, sectors, territory - consists of partners that complement each other	C.3	
		Partner organisations have proven experience and competence in the thematic field concerned, as well as the necessary capacity to implement the project (financial, human resources, etc.)	B.1.6	
		All partners play a defined role in the partnership and the territory benefits from this cooperation.	C.3	

Operational assessment criteria

Topic	Assessment question	Assessment will be based primarily on the responses to the following questions	Section in the full application form	Rating (Dropdown list: <i>Strong, Sufficient, Weak, Insufficient</i>)
Work plan	To what extent is the work plan realistic, consistent and coherent?	Proposed activities and deliverables are relevant and should lead to planned outputs and results.	C.4, C.5	[DROPDOWN]
		Distribution of tasks among partners is appropriate (e.g. sharing of tasks is clear, logical, in line with partners' role in the project, etc.).	C.4	
		The importance and transnational relevance of investments is clear. (if applicable).	C.4	
Communication	To what extent are communication activities appropriate to reach the relevant target	The communication objectives are relevant and are expected to contribute to project specific objectives.	C.4	[DROPDOWN]
		Communication activities (and deliverables) are appropriate to reach the relevant target groups and stakeholders.	C.4	
		The coordination of project communication is properly planned and the involvement of all partners is ensured. The	C.7.3	

	groups and stakeholders?	project communication contributes to transferring of project results.		
Project management	Is the project management properly planned?	Tasks and responsibilities of the project partners are clear, and the proposed management of the project seems well organised.	C.7.1	
		Measures proposed by the partnership to ensure the quality of project implementation (e.g. midterm evaluation) are well thought through.	C.7.2	
		The financial management of the project and the reporting procedures for activities and budget are clearly described and are in line with the programme rules.	C.7.4	
Budget	To what extent is the project budget in line with the principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness?	<p>The principle of economy concerns minimising costs. The resources used by the project partnership to carry out its activities should be made available in due time, in appropriate quantity and quality, and at the best price.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The budget allocated to staff and external expertise is in line with the project content and the costs are realistic. - Sufficient and reasonable resources are planned to ensure project implementation. 	D.2 & E.3	[DROPDOWN]

		<p>The principle of efficiency concerns getting the most from the available resources. It is concerned with the relationship between resources employed and outputs delivered in terms of quantity, quality and timing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The need for engaging external expertise is justified and the costs seem realistic. - Financial allocation per cost category is in line with the work plan. - If applicable, the distribution of the budget per period is in line with the work plan. - The application of lump sums and unit costs is appropriate and in line with the programme rules. 		
		<p>The principle of effectiveness concerns meeting the project objectives and achieving the intended results.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The available information in the budget is transparent and sufficient. On that basis, the project budget appears proportionate to the proposed work plan, project outputs and project's contribution to programme indicators aimed for. - Sufficient and reasonable resources are planned for investments and equipment purchases (if applicable) and their costs are realistic. 		
<p>To be filled in by the assessors</p>				

Intervention field				
	In which intervention field is the project implemented?	Assessor chooses from the pre-defined list.		[DROPDOWN]

Annex 3

Small-scale Project application – Assessment checklist

Strategic assessment criteria

Topic	Assessment question	Assessment will be based primarily on the responses to the following questions	Section in the full application form	Rating (Dropdown list: <i>Strong, Sufficient, Weak, Insufficient</i>)
Project relevance	How well is a need for the project justified?	The project addresses common territorial challenges of the programme or a joint asset of the programme area - there is a real need for the project (well justified, reasonable, well explained).	C.2.1 and C.2.2 (A.2 'Project summary' can be used throughout the strategic assessment of	[DROPDOWN]

			the applications)	
To what extent will the project contribute to the achievement of programme's objectives and indicators?	The project overall objective clearly contributes to the achievement of the programme priority specific objective.	C.1	[DROPDOWN]	
	The project contributes to (a) spotlight theme(s) identified by the programme. FOR INFORMATION ONLY! YES/NO question in the assessment drop down.	C.1		
	The project outputs clearly link to programme output indicators and their contribution to programme targets is sufficient.	C.4 Output tables in work packages		
	Project's contribution to programme result indicators is realistic and sufficient.	C.5		
	The project tries to avoid overlaps and replications; there is evolution of ideas.	C.2.2, C.2.4		
	The project demonstrates new solutions that go beyond the existing practice in the sector/programme area/participating countries or adapts and implements already developed solutions.	C.2.2		

	To what extent is the project addressing the purpose of the small-scale projects defined in the guidance note?	The project content is in line with the purpose of the small-scale projects highlighted in the guidance note of the call.	A.2; C.2	[DROPDOWN]
Cooperation character	What added value does the cooperation bring?	The importance of cooperation beyond borders for the topic addressed is clearly demonstrated	C.2.3	[DROPDOWN]
		The results cannot (or only to some extent) be achieved without cooperation.	C.2.3	
		There is a clear benefit from cooperating for the project partners / target groups / project area / programme area.	C.2.3	
Project intervention logic	To what extent is project intervention logic plausible?	Project overall objective is specific, realistic and achievable.	C.4	[DROPDOWN]
		Proposed project outputs are needed to achieve the project overall objective.	C.4	
		Project outputs and results that contribute to programme indicators are realistic (it is possible to achieve them with given resources – i.e. time, partners, budget - and they are realistic based on the quantification provided).	C.4, C.5, C.6, D	

	To what extent will project outputs extend beyond the project lifetime?	Project outputs are durable (the proposal is expected to provide a significant and durable contribution to solving the targeted challenges) – if not, it is justified.	C.8	[DROPDOWN]
		Main project outputs are applicable and replicable by organisations/regions/countries outside the project partnership (transferability) – if not, it is justified.	C.8	
Partnership relevance	To what extent is the partnership composition relevant for the proposed project?	The project involves the relevant actors needed to address the territorial challenge/joint asset and the objectives specified.	C.3	[DROPDOWN]
		Considering the project's objectives the project partnership: - is balanced with respect to the levels, sectors, territory - consists of partners that complement each other	C.3	
		All partners play a defined role in the partnership and the territory benefits from this cooperation.	C.3	

Operational assessment criteria

Topic	Assessment question	Assessment will be based primarily on the responses to the following questions	Section in the full application form	Rating (Dropdown list: <i>Strong, Sufficient,</i>
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				Weak, Insufficient)
Work plan	To what extent is the work plan realistic, consistent and coherent?	Proposed activities and deliverables are relevant and should lead to planned outputs and results.	C.4, C.5	[DROPDOWN]
		Distribution of tasks among partners is appropriate (e.g. sharing of tasks is clear, logical, in line with partners' role in the project, etc.).	C.4	
		The importance and transnational relevance of investments is clear. (if applicable).	C.4	
Communication	To what extent are communication activities appropriate to reach the relevant target groups and stakeholders?	The communication objective is relevant and are expected to contribute to project specific objectives.	C.4	[DROPDOWN]
		Communication activities (and deliverables) are appropriate to reach the relevant target groups and stakeholders.	C.4	
		The coordination of project communication is properly planned and the involvement of all partners is ensured. The project communication contributes to transferring of project results.	C.7.2	
	Is the project management properly planned?	Tasks and responsibilities of the project partners are clear, and the proposed management of the project seems well organised.	C.7.1	

Project management				
Budget	To what extent is the project budget in line with the principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness?	<p>The principle of economy concerns minimising costs. The resources used by the project partnership to carry out its activities should be made available in due time, in appropriate quantity and quality, and at the best price.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The budget allocated to staff and external expertise is in line with the project content and the costs are realistic. - Sufficient and reasonable resources are planned to ensure project implementation. <hr/> <p>The principle of efficiency concerns getting the most from the available resources. It is concerned with the relationship between resources employed and outputs delivered in terms of quantity, quality and timing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The need for engaging external expertise is justified and the costs seem realistic. - Financial allocation per cost category is in line with the work plan. 	D.2 & E.3	[DROPDOWN]

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If applicable, the distribution of the budget per period is in line with the work plan. - The application of lump sums and unit costs is appropriate and in line with the programme rules. 		
		<p>The principle of effectiveness concerns meeting the project objectives and achieving the intended results.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The available information in the budget is transparent and sufficient. On that basis, the project budget appears proportionate to the proposed work plan, project outputs and project's contribution to programme indicators aimed for. - Sufficient and reasonable resources are planned for investments and equipment purchases (if applicable) and their costs are realistic. 		
To be filled in by the assessors				
Intervention field				
	In which intervention field is the project implemented?	Assessor chooses from the pre-defined list.		[DROPDOWN]