General Guidance for Project Applicants & Guidance for Call 10

Please note that Call 10 is open for Expressions of Interest only!

Contents

General Note

- Please note that this call is open to Expressions of Interest (EOI) only! The tenth call for applications opens on 2 January and closes on 8 April 2019. The programme's Steering Committee will meet in June 2019 to decide about the submitted EOIs. Successful EOIs will be invited to apply in Call 11, which will be open only for Full Applications (FA). Call 11 will be launched on 28 June and close on 30 September 2019. Please consult our website for more information.
- New and rejected Expressions of Interest can apply in Call 10. Project Extensions can also be submitted.

General Guidance for project applicants

How to use this document?

- This guidance is meant as an introduction to the programme and provides the most important rules and requirements for applicants when submitting an Expression of Interest. Reference to stage 2 about submitting a Full Application is made where necessary. This document is not intended as a replacement for the official documents and rules, and all applicants should refer to the official documents before they apply to the programme. Please note that there is also specific guidance for each call for applications, which sets out any special conditions applying for that call. You can find the specific guidance at the end of this document.

Two-stage application

- All project developers are asked to submit an Expression of Interest. If the programme's Steering Committee approves the Expression of Interest, the project will be asked to develop and submit a Full Application. If this is approved, the project will receive a contract and can start work.

- After an Expression of Interest is approved, the project team must submit a Full Application prior to one of the next two meetings of the Steering Committee.

- The Full Application requires detailed activity plans with targets, budgets, and timelines, as well as technical information and funding guarantees from beneficiary organisations. A lump sum payment of €20,000 is paid to all approved projects for preparation costs, provided they request it in the full application form.

Who can apply?

- The North Sea Region Programme is open to anyone in the programme area, which is the whole of Norway and Denmark, eastern parts of the United Kingdom, the Flemish Region of Belgium, northwest Germany, the northern and western parts of the Netherlands and the south-western area of Sweden. There is a detailed list of participating regions in the Cooperation Programme.

- You must apply as part of a partnership, and every partnership must include at least 2 beneficiaries from 2 different countries. However, projects should have a positive effect on large parts of the programme area so only meeting the minimum requirements will generally be considered a weakness.

- You need to be a legal entity (organization or enterprise) based in the programme area in order to apply. There are limits on which private sector organisations can perform the role of Lead Beneficiary. Please see Fact Sheet 13 for details. Partners from outside the programme area can be part of a partnership under special conditions. At present, however, the Managing Authority faces major difficulties establishing effective control and audit arrangements for countries outside the North Sea Region. You should therefore be aware that partners from outside the North Sea Region may have to be excluded from the partnership. Consult Fact Sheet 18 for further details.

How long does the programme last?

- The programme funding period is 2014 to 2020, but this is only the period when the European Commission provides its funds to the programme. These funds can be spent for some years after the final grant is provided by the European Commission. All projects, however, must complete all activities, including final reporting, by mid-2023.

What kinds of issues does the programme focus on?

- The programme has 4 priority themes and each theme is divided into two or three specific objectives. Consult the Overview Table in the Citizens Summary for a quick overview of priorities and specific objectives. Every project has to select one specific objective that it will work towards. In past programme periods, broad projects tackling a number of objectives were sometimes approved but projects for the current period must be more focused and all activities must clearly contribute towards the specific objective. If you are not sure under which specific objective you should apply, take a look at the output indicators for the specific objective (Fact Sheet 23). This should give you a clear idea of what the programme expects from projects under each specific objective.

- The descriptions of the priorities in the Cooperation Programme also include examples of the types of activities and outcomes expected. These are only examples! Any relevant activity that clearly requires cooperation and will contribute strongly to a specific objective can be considered for funding. Likewise, the fact that an activity is mentioned in the Cooperation Programme does not guarantee that a project application will be successful if it includes that activity, especially if the overall contribution to the specific objective is weak.

- In addition to specific themes, all projects granted funding under the programme have to comply with a number of cross-cutting issues like the need to promote equal opportunities and sustainable development. These are covered below.

- There is more focus on results in this programme than previous programmes. All projects under the same specific objective will have to use many of the same indicators to ensure that results can be compiled into total figures for reporting to national authorities and the European Commission. Most indicators are compulsory and the system is simple to follow. A separate fact sheet on indicators tells you exactly what you need to do, but as a general rule make sure that the indicators and targets you use are realistic and capture what you are trying to achieve.

- Indicators fall into three types. Use the deliverables to describe the activities you will be delivering (meetings, reports, pilots, etc.). Use the outputs (which are automatically selected for you depending on which specific objective you are applying under) to show how the project has delivered against the main programme targets (number of new green transport services, etc.) and how widely you have communicated your achievements outside the partnership. Use your project results to show the benefit and quality of these outputs. For some examples of good results, please refer to this page on our website.

- The Cooperation Programme and Citizen Summary also contain some examples of successful project types exploring how organizations can work together regardless of theme. These are meant to inspire applicants but do not mean that other types of cooperation are impossible. You can also see examples of on-going projects via the project database on the North Sea Region Programme website.

Are there special rules for Norway?

- Norwegian beneficiaries and Lead Beneficiaries are treated the same as EU beneficiaries in the North Sea Region programme and are subject to the same rules.

- The only important difference is that Norwegian beneficiaries are funded from their own separate reserve of Norwegian money. As a result, Norwegian money is kept separate from EU money in the application and reporting systems.

Can private companies get involved?

- Private companies, in particular SMEs, are welcome. They must demonstrate that their work contributes to wider programme goals. For some specific objectives (especially under priority 1), the strength of private sector involvement will be one of the main factors deciding whether a project application is assessed positively.

- There are specific requirements for how companies operate in the programme, and all participating enterprises must agree to respect these rules. These often differ from standard private sector operating procedures. The rules cover issues like State aid, revenue generation, real cost principles, public procurement, and record keeping. It is essential that all private sector partners consult these rules carefully before committing to the programme in order to avoid problems during implementation. They are described in separate fact sheets on State Aid (16 and 17), Private Sector Beneficiaries (15), and Intellectual Property Rights and ownership of project investments (27).

How should partnerships work together?

- All of the beneficiaries must cooperate on joint development and joint implementation of the project. As a change from earlier programmes, each beneficiary must state in the full application how they will be involved, what they will deliver, and what they expect to gain from the project. It is important that these comments do not address the general operations of each organization but are related to the specific actions to be carried out in the project.

- Beneficiaries must also cooperate in the staffing and/or financing of the project. When filling in the application form, projects are asked to explain how staff will work together on delivering the project. There are also various options for using shared costs for activities carried out on behalf of the whole partnership.

- The need for transnational cooperation needs to be reflected in the way that project activities are planned and implemented. It is not enough for each beneficiary to act independently and then exchange results. Beneficiaries should help each other to design, implement, and communicate new solutions to the problems they are tackling.

- It is also important to involve the 'right' beneficiaries – meaning those with the required expertise and contacts in each country. The partnership will be assessed on whether it has the right skills and knowledge in place in each participating country.

- The partnership also needs to be viable, which means that all beneficiaries should have a clear role in the project, be committed for the entire lifetime of the project, and be prepared to support activities after the lifetime of the project.

- It is also important to demonstrate the involvement and support of the main users of project results. For example, a project to develop new ways of encouraging SME innovation must involve effective feedback from SMEs if the results are to be credible.

What is the role of the Lead Beneficiary?

- The Lead Beneficiary leads the project, ensures that all beneficiaries deliver what has been promised, and is the contact point between the project and programme management. Every project must have a Lead Beneficiary agreed by the partnership. In particular, the Lead Beneficiary will:

  - Prepare and submit the application (in cooperation with the rest of the partnership)
  - Prepare and submit all progress reports and requests for payment based on inputs from the other beneficiaries (see Control and Audit for details)
  - Ensure that information from or to the programme is communicated on time and in full
  - Receive all payments from the programme and distribute the amounts owed to all beneficiaries

- There is a separate fact sheet providing more detail on the Lead Beneficiary's role and explaining different roles and responsibilities within partnerships.

Help for small organizations

- It can be difficult, especially for small organizations with limited resources, to understand all of the programme rules and procedures and fill in the required forms. Although such organisations often fill an important but limited role in the partnership, they may feel that the budgets available are not worth the administrative effort of participation. These partners may therefore participate as 'co-beneficiaries'.

- Small co-beneficiaries can be grouped together as a Local Partnership under one larger Coordinating Beneficiary (generally a public authority of some kind). The advantage of forming this Local Partnership is that all beneficiaries submit a combined claim for payment and activity report (less paperwork). All members of the Local Partnership must be based in the same country. This also means that the whole local partnership can use the same First Level Controller (see below) and get its expenditure checked at the same time (to lower control costs).

- ❖ There is a separate fact sheet with detailed rules about this, but the following points must be kept in mind:

  - All co-beneficiaries are still subject to all programme rules concerning the eligibility of funding
  - All co-beneficiaries must keep full separate records of their expenditure
  - It is the responsibility of the Coordinating Beneficiary to ensure that there is real and effective control of all co-beneficiary expenditure
  - Co-beneficiaries are still liable for any irregularities in their expenditure and are covered by the standard programme rules for repaying any amounts incorrectly paid out.

Funding rates

- ❖ All partners can claim reimbursement of 50% of costs for all project activities, although applicants should always check the specific conditions for each call for proposals for information on the total funds still available and any special funding terms that may apply. There is no formal minimum or maximum budget for projects, but projects will be assessed on value for money and larger projects will be expected to deliver significant benefits to the programme area.

Information about funding opportunities

- ❖ The programme launches regular calls for proposals. All project applications correctly submitted through the Online Monitoring System with all relevant supporting documents before the end of a call will be assessed. Applicants should regularly consult the programme website at www.northsearegion.eu for announcements about new calls. As a rule these will happen every six months or so during the start of the programme.

Important documents

- ❖ You have to make sure that your project idea fits with the programme. Regardless of thematic strengths, applications can only be approved if there is a clear link to European policy goals and the interests and needs of the wider programme area. The detailed programme strategy and expectations for projects under each priority theme are set out in the Cooperation Programme. A shorter Citizen Summary provides only the information needed for project partners. The Programme Manual provides a short overview of other information.

Cross-cutting issues

- Cooperation: This should be reflected in a work plan based on joint efforts to develop and implement new solutions. Cooperation should also be understood as bringing together different sectors (sometimes called 'horizontal' cooperation) and different levels of administration from local to international (sometimes called 'vertical' cooperation). The aim of these multi-level and multi-disciplinary approaches is to develop durable solutions based on winning the support of all main stakeholder groups. This need for cooperation should be balanced against the need to ensure that the partnership remains manageable and focused on core stakeholders. The wider stakeholder network will often not be part of the partnership but will be involved in other ways. This should be described in the application.

- Innovativeness: Some parts of the programme focus on 'innovation' in the sense of developing new products and services for the market. All parts of the programme should be 'innovative' in the sense of developing and spreading new and improved solutions throughout the partnership and the wider programme area. Some projects will try to develop completely new approaches to the challenges they are addressing. Others will try to introduce existing technologies and methods into areas or organizations where they have not been used before. The priority descriptions in the Cooperation Programme contain information on the preferred approach for some specific objectives. Applications should clearly set out the innovative aspects of the projects and how they differ from existing norms and practices in target regions / organisations.

- Additionality: Project funds cannot be used to fund the regular activities of partner organisations. The activities carried out in the project should be *in addition* to the normal work of the beneficiaries, and programme funds will only cover the costs for this additional work.

- Integrated approach to territorial development: All activities should be considered in terms of their likely effect on the wider programme area. Project activities should promote balanced development across the region and should especially aim to support regions facing particular geographical, structural or economic challenges. A specific section of the Cooperation Programme provides indications about how this can be approached.

- ❖ Sustainable Development: North Sea Region 2014-2020 works for the on-going improvement of sustainability. During project development, projects should consider how to ensure net social, environmental, and climate benefits (where possible), in particular when making investments.

- ❖ Equal opportunities and non-discrimination: All organisations involved in the North Sea Region 2014-2020 must contribute to a positive environment for the active pursuit of equal opportunities and the prevention of deprivation, exclusion, and discrimination in all forms.

- ❖ Explain links to other policies and funds: Projects must demonstrate an awareness of the main actions and results under related programmes, and applications should reflect on how the North Sea project fits into this wider picture. In particular, projects should highlight specific results from earlier projects that can be used in the new project, and explain how the expected results of the new project will feed back into other programmes and funds. The Cooperation Programme contains an overview of the most relevant policies and funds, but the application should also address national and regional actions.

How to find partners

- ❖ The project ideas section on the website allows you to publish project outlines and review the ideas being prepared by others.

- ❖ There are regular events held by the Joint Secretariat offering structured sessions where you can meet potential partners. Please see the North Sea Region Programme website for more information. These events are free of charge, but we encourage only those who are serious about submitting an EOI to attend.

- ❖ National Contact Points can also assist you in making contacts in some cases (see below for a link to their page on the NSRP website)

- ❖ Check online discussion groups and social media for partner search features.

How to apply

- ❖ A description of the application procedure can be found in the programme manual.

- ❖ Expressions of Interest must be submitted through the Online Monitoring System (OMS), which also has technical information about how to fill in the different parts of the form. All documentation is electronic so there is no need to send any paper copies with an Expression of Interest. You may enter the OMS via the programme's website where you fill a direct link on top of the page: www.northsearegion.eu

How to prepare a good application

- Assessments are based on the information provided in the application **only**. You should not rely on assumed knowledge or arguments about, for example, the general need for innovation support or sustainable public transport. Instead you should relate these to the specific circumstances of the beneficiaries and the programme area. In particular, you must make sure that you clearly explain:
  - The need for your project and how it differs from current norms and practices
  - The need for transnational cooperation
  - The role and main tasks of each partner
  - The outputs and results that will be delivered
  - How you will ensure that the project has an impact beyond the project partnership and after the end of the funding period
- Try to avoid quoting programme documents and focus on clearly explaining what your project will do and deliver
- Try to avoid jargon and abbreviations

What is the Steering Committee really looking for?

- The programme uses a set of assessment criteria according to which every project proposal is evaluated. In addition, however, representatives of the countries in the programme have provided an informal list of key points that can positively influence how they look at an application. Their suggestions include:
  - Use easy language (answer the right questions in non-technical language).
  - Be very clear about the assumptions behind the project
    - Is it clear why all of the actions are included?
    - Is there a clear logic for moving from one action to the next?
    - What would happen if one activity needed to be changed? Are they all necessary?
  - Show the added value of each result / output - for each partner and for the North Sea Region. Outputs and results are the indicators that allow the member states to understand the impact the project should have on the region, which is a very important consideration when deciding whether to fund the project (see also page 5). Include a baseline (even if it is zero) in the description for each result. If there is no baseline set yet, explain how and when it will be set during project implementation. If you have any questions about the quantitative indicators for your project, you are strongly advised to consult closely with a project advisor prior

to the deadline for content-related advice (**see page 15 for more information**). In addition, we recommend that you take a close look at the guidance provided on the North Sea Region Programme website and in Fact Sheet 23

- Show how you will focus your communication efforts. In particular, have you selected the right target groups and appropriate channels / means for reaching them?
- Explain the road to the application. Why has the partnership decided that this project is the solution?
- Describe what you want to change and where (geographically).
- Think about what could go wrong and how you will mitigate any problems. Show you are aware of the main risks and how you will manage them.
- How will you test whether the desired change has been delivered?
- Embed your project in the context of regional strategies and other programmes.
- Be concise!

There is no golden rule for getting a project approved. Following the advice here and using the support available will, however, give you a good chance.

Assistance with preparing an application

- National Contact Points can provide extensive information and individual guidance on how to apply. There is a list of Contact Points on the NSRP website.
- Online materials about rules and procedures are collected in the Programme Manual and Fact Sheets.
- Project advisors at the Joint Secretariat in Denmark can provide you with phone, email, and/or teleconference consultations on ideas submitted before a call for applications opens. Once a call for applications is open you can only approach the secretariat for advice on technical issues - not on content.
- Project ideas submitted to the programme can be found in the project idea section on www.northsearegion.eu.
- An overview of projects funded during the IVB programme can be found on results.northsearegion.eu. You may also find information about the already approved projects in the current VB programme in the project database: http://projects.northsearegion.eu/vb/overview/. Make sure you check to see whether projects similar to your own idea have been funded in the past and, if so, make sure you explain clearly how you will add to what was achieved in the past.

- General support includes:

- Seminars and conferences where you can hear the latest news and ask questions
- Website and other online materials with regular updates
- Publications and fact sheets (for an overview see the Programme Manual)
- The possibility to submit project ideas and receive informal feedback on how well your project fits the programme and possible areas for improvement

Assessment of Expressions of Interest

- You will only be able to submit your application through the Online Monitoring System if you have correctly completed all sections.

- The assessment is based on the programme's assessment criteria. In the case of Expressions of Interest, a limited set of criteria is used to assess the degree to which a potential project will match the programme's objectives and envisaged results. The assessment end with a recommendation to the Steering Committee on whether the Expression of Interests should be approved or rejected. You can find the assessment criteria in Fact Sheet 19.

- At the second stage assessment of the Full Application will also consider whether the project corresponds to the proposal you made in the Expression of Interest. If there are significant differences, particularly with regard to the results that will be delivered and the budget, they will be highlighted in the assessment and considered when the Steering Committee makes its funding decision.

How is the funding decision made?

- Project applications and assessments, together with a recommendation to fund or reject the project, are provided to the programme's Steering Committee, which is made up of national and regional representatives from all of the countries in the programme. The committee decides whether to approve or reject the project based on the secretariat's assessment, and sets any conditions that need to be met before contracting.

- The selection decision is primarily based on the assessment of the proposal. Other factors may, however, also play a role, especially the amount of available funding. As a result, there is no guarantee that a project that is positively assessed will be approved. The decision of the committee is final.

- All applicants will be informed about the committee's decision in writing. You can complain if your project is rejected. Complaints can only address the assessment procedure and will be expected to demonstrate that there has been a clear and significant breech of the published procedures and criteria. If a complaint is upheld, your project will be considered at the next meeting. The Complaints Procedure is available online.

What happens after approval?

- You will receive a decision letter as soon as possible after approval. This may include recommendations to take into consideration when developing a Full Application.

Open access to all results

- It is a **requirement** that every project partner disseminate the results it produces as early as possible. Only beneficiaries participating in the programme under an approved State Aid scheme are exempted.

Special guidance for Call 10

The tenth call for applications opens on 2 January and closes on 8 April 2019. It is open for Expressions of Interest only. Project Extensions can also be submitted. Projects can consult with the Joint Secretariat project advisors on the content of their EOI up until Monday, 18 March, after which they may still speak with national contact points about content-related issues. Between 19 March and the submission deadline, they may only ask the Joint Secretariat about technical issues.

A portion of the programme's funds have already been allocated to projects during call 1, call 2, call 3, call 5, and call 7. The tables below shows the amounts allocated, remaining funds for each priority, and the breakdown of full applications approved under each specific objective.The programme's Monitoring Committee approved a motion in November 2018 to re-allocate funding among the priorities in order to fund more projects in priority 3. However, this reallocation must be approved by the European Commission via a change to the Cooperation Programme. Approval is likely, and the second table reflects the reallocated amounts per priority should the Commission, indeed, approve the request. However, the first table contains amounts of remaining funding should the request not be granted.

Table 1: Funding allocated and remaining after Call 7

1. Priority and specific objective	2. Number of Full Applications approved	3. ERDF funds allocated	4. ERDF funds remaining	5. Norwegian funds remaining
1.1	4	€ 6.662.196	€ 11.373.446	€ 1.294.859
1.2	8	€ 16.086.540		
1.3	6	€ 12.708.930		
2.1	9	€ 19.272.143	€ 10.612.120	
2.2	6	€ 15.274.309		
3.1	7	€ 19.730.070	€ 0	
3.2	10	€ 19.070.164		
4.1	1	€ 1.751.368	€ 7.836.799	
4.2	9	€ 18.845.008		
Total	**60**	**€ 129.400.728**		**€ 1.294.859**

Table 2: Funding allocated and remaining after Call 7 with reallocation of funding among priorities

1. Priority and specific objective	2. Number of Full Applications approved	3. ERDF funds allocated	4. ERDF funds remaining	5. Norwegian funds remaining
1.1	4	€ 6.662.196	€ 9.236.120	€ 1.294.859
1.2	8	€ 16.086.540		
1.3	6	€ 12.708.930		
2.1	9	€ 19.272.143	€ 7.802.253	
2.2	6	€ 15.274.309		
3.1	7	€ 19.730.070	€ 5.221.011	
3.2	10	€ 19.070.164		
4.1	1	€ 1.751.368	€ 5.558.622	
4.2	9	€ 18.845.008		
Total	**60**	**€ 129.400.728**	**€ 27.818.005**	**€ 1.294.859**

- ❖ Reading these tables: Column 2 holds the number of approved Full Applications under each specific objective in Calls 1, 2, 3, 5, and 7. The numbers in Column 3 show the level of interest and success in each specific objective. However, funding is allocated per priority (not per specific objective), so column 4 shows the remaining funds for each programme priority after Call 7. Column 5 provides information on the use of Norwegian funding. It reflects the remaining Norwegian funding after the approval of Full Applications in Call 7.

❖ You may find information about the already approved projects in the project database: http://projects.northsearegion.eu/vb/overview/

❖ **Anyone planning on submitting an Expression of Interest should attend the programme's Interwork event on 16-17 January in The Hague, the Netherlands for**

detailed guidance and one-to-one feedback on application details. Please see the programme website for further information about this event and the link to online registration.

- ❖ The focus of our assessments is on the quality of the proposed project, as detailed in the Expression of Interest. Even experienced partners should carefully consult the programme guidance and make use of the advisory services available to avoid disappointment. Please note that some of the main reasons for rejection of Full Applications in Call 5 were insufficient or unconvincing results and inexperienced or displaced partnerships. Some Expressions of Interest in Call 6 were rejected because of rudimentary partnership descriptions that did not clarify at least a basic role for each partner or alluded to partners that would join but with no firm explanation of how they envisioned the final partnership. Moreover, some EOIs lacked a convincing demand for the project, provided very weak justification for the need for transnational cooperation, or included weak or no results. In some cases the budget was disproportionate to the idea and partnership described.
- ❖ Note that Fact Sheets change frequently – make sure that you check the new versions on the programme's website before completing your application.
- ❖ Rules and procedures are always evolving, so it is essential that applicants regularly consult the programme website for important updates. Similarly the Joint Secretariat is making regular adjustments to the programme's website and Online Monitoring System. Please be patient if you experience any problems with these and inform the joint secretariat about them so we can work to resolve important errors as soon as possible.

e-guidance – The programme is continuously developing different electronic formats for your guidance. You may find, e.g. electronic guidance materials about 10 lessons learned for project developers, how to develop your application according to the programmes' intervention logic, and what to consider when formulating your project results.

www.northsearegion.eu