

# H2020 Work Programme 2014-15:

## Spreading Excellence and Widening Participation

### Call: WIDESPREAD 1-2014: Teaming

#### Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

**IMPORTANT NOTICE:** This document is the result of a compilation of questions received by potential applications prior the deadline and answers provided by the European Commission. Its intention is to help potential applicants. It does not however replace the call text. This document is a working document being revised on a regular basis.

**UPDATE: A number of FAQs (from Question 21 onwards) have been added to the earlier version of this document that was published at the end of March 2014.**

#### **1: Is there any specific requirement on the nature of the organisation representing the low performing Member State? Is the involvement of a national/regional authority mandatory?**

- No proposal will be disqualified on grounds of non-eligibility for having an applicant organisation of an incorrect nature.
- However, while there is no explicit legal obligation to precondition the nature of the organisation from the low performing Member State (MS), there is nevertheless an obligation for the Business Plan (which will serve as the main deliverable for succeeding to Stage 2) to include a financial commitment from the 'national or regional authority'. This obligation requires the involvement of a 'national or regional authority' at least through the submission of the Stage 1 deliverable (that is, the Business Plan).
- Based on the above, it is reasonable to expect that such requirements would best be met through establishing partnership with a 'national or regional authority' at the initial stages of the teaming process.

#### **2: Is there any limitation to how many partners can participate from a low performing MS?**

- The main applicant (and coordinator) coming from a low performing Member State is expected to be represented by one single organisation.
- However such an organisation could also represent a group of entities within the low performing Member State operating as a single organisation.
- In addition, it is possible to engage one additional partner from the low performing Member State to the project.

### **3: Can the participant organisation from a low performing MS be either public or private?**

- Yes. The Work Programme text does not distinguish between the specific public or private nature of the organisation but only provides by way of example that the participant organisation from the low performing Member State could be 'a national or regional authority, or a research agency at national or regional level'.

### **4: Is there any preference or recommendation as to whether a Teaming project would best be coordinated by a national/regional authority, a research agency or a research institution such as university?**

- While not excluding other cases, it is encouraged and preferable for teaming proposals to be coordinated by national/regional authorities or a research agency. It is considered that such organisations would be best placed to secure sufficient national/ESIF funding for the implementation of the future Centre of Excellence.

### **5: What is the key role and expected activity of the institution of research and innovation excellence?**

- A key role of the 'advanced partnering' organisation will be to contribute towards the nurturing and development of the research and innovation potential of the less performing Member State or region through sharing its own accumulated expertise, reputation, access to international networks, and its experience in management and administration in a specific area of research and innovation. This role will be exercised through the direct partnering and involvement in the setting up of a new Centre of Excellence in a less performing Member State.
- It is essentially up to the project partnership to propose diverse activities and ways of involvement which will meet the main objective.

### **6: Where should the institution(s) of research and innovation excellence be established?**

- The institution(s) of research and innovation excellence can be established in any EU Member State or Associated Country to Horizon 2020.

### **7: Can the institution(s) of research and innovation excellence be established in the same country as the participant from the low performing country?**

- No. The teaming/partnering organisation should be coming from a Member State or Associated Country other than that of the applicant from the low performing country.

### **8: Can the institution of research and innovation excellence receive financial remuneration from a Teaming project, and what sort of costs could be charged to such a project?**

- Apart from large infrastructure or large equipment costs (that cannot be funded from H2020), the WP does not place any specific limit on the amount or type of costs which could be charged to a Teaming project by any of its project partners. Legal costs, costs for

exchanges of personnel, travel allowances, costs associated with the provision of expertise and access to physical or human resources, and staffing costs, are some of the typical costs we expect to see financed under a Teaming project.

**9: Should the organisation from the low performing MS that will eventually be foreseen to implement and/or manage the Centre of Excellence (in Stage 2) be the same as the one(s) that submitted and were successful in securing funding from Stage 1 (Business Plan)?**

- The obligation for the implementation of both Stage 1 and Stage 2 of any Teaming project and the beneficiaries thereof, is limited to those organisations that are legally bound by the conditions set out in the respective contracts with the European Commission.
- Should the said binding partnership foresee the need to set up a new legal entity or to introduce a new legal entity to the Teaming project for the purpose of its implementation, following appropriate justification and explanation, such change would likely require a modification to the existing contract with the European Commission.

**10: In the case of the setting up of a new Centre of Excellence, can the centre only be set up in Stage 2 of a Teaming project?**

- A Teaming proposal should only involve either: 1) future centres that do not exist and are yet to be established following the presentation of a vision, or, 2) centres that already exist but require upgrading.
- The funding for the ‘implementation phase’ of a future Centre will only be granted in Stage 2 of a Teaming project. It is not considered possible for the implementation or construction of a *new* centre of excellence to commence during the course of Stage 1 as any such development would run contrary to the spirit of the action.
- The same reasoning would apply in the case of ‘upgrading of an existing one’, where such upgrade would only take place during Stage 2.
- It should be emphasised that centres of excellence that are already in the process of implementation would not qualify for a Teaming action since Teaming projects are concerned with the *establishment of new or upgrading of existing* infrastructures.

**11: Can a Teaming proposal be submitted by an organisation that is already presently in charge of administering or has in the past been in charge of establishing centre of excellence?**

- Yes. There is no limitation relating to past experience with managing/establishing other centres of excellence.

**12: By what means, in what form, who, and at what level must a commitment for financial resources be made (infrastructure, equipment etc)?**

- With respect to the *means* by which a commitment must be made, apart from the EC contribution made in Stage 2 of a Teaming project, costs are expected to be financed by other sources. The European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) are mentioned by way

of example. This means that any other sources of funding such as national funding or private investment could also be used.

- The WP text does not stipulate the *form* in which such commitment must be made thus giving the applicant flexibility. One possible way could be through a signed memorandum of understanding or legal agreement. In any event, such commitment remains an integral part of ensuring the completion of such a project. For this reason, it can be expected that the evaluation of the Business Plan would look for a high degree of certainty in such commitment.
- With respect to *who* must make such a commitment, it would be the interested national or regional authorities.
- On the *level* of the expected financial commitment, this should be sufficient to ensure the implementation of the project within a reasonable level of doubt. For the purpose of the evaluation of Business Plans, it is reasonable to expect that any financial commitment must reflect budgetary projections and relevant contingency.
- It should also be noted that the “relevance” and “applicability” of use of the ESIF is not determined by this WP but is regulated by the relevant legislation and policies associated with the implementation of the ESIF and adopted by the Commission and the Member States (See for example the relevant regulations, Operational Programmes and Smart Specialisation Strategies of the Member States concerned).

**13: The call asks for the creation of or upgrading of Centres of Excellence. How is a Centre of Excellence defined in terms of this call?**

- There is no specific definition for a Centre of Excellence, thus allowing a reasonably flexible approach.
- However, whereas a Centre of Excellence is expected to be primarily focused on scientific excellence, Horizon 2020 introduces an increased focus on the innovation aspect. Teaming projects would be expected to demonstrate research potential together with the potential for innovation exploitation and the subsequent potential economic and regional impact.

**14: Is the goal of drawing up a Business Plan to produce a strategy or to present a more detailed operational plan proposing specific actions to be taken within a specific timeframe?**

- The Business Plan should illustrate:
  - the scientific and innovation potential of the future centre;
  - the feasibility and realistic possibility of actually attaining such potential;
  - the feasibility of attaining such potential within a foreseen timeframe of implementation;

- Whilst, therefore, a detailed planning schedule should form a part of the Business Plan, it is not the sole purpose.
- Considering the relevant budget awarded and the time allocated for completion of Stage 1, the applicant will have considerable flexibility on the way to produce a Business Plan which is both convincing and competitive enough to secure funding in Stage 2.

**15: Will the same Eligibility and Evaluation Criteria found in the WP apply at both Stage 1 and Stage 2 of a Teaming proposal?**

- The Eligibility and Evaluation Criteria detailed in the Work Programme are the ones that will be the basis for awarding contracts for Stage 1 of Teaming proposals.
- For stage 2, the foreseen evaluation criteria are scientific excellence), impact on innovation and quality of the proposed implementation plan.
- Whilst ensuring consistency with the Eligibility and Evaluation Criteria listed in the WP, the Commission may at a later stage draw up additional evaluation criteria to ensure that only the proposals that best fulfil the programme objectives as set out above proceed to Stage 2.

**16: Do Teaming projects which have been considered eligible and have been positively evaluated to receive funding in Stage 1, 'automatically' proceed to Stage 2?**

- Yes. All funded proposals of the first stage will enter into the second stage of the competition should the participant so wishes.
- For technical reasons, exercising this right to participate in Stage 2 will involve making a separate and formal submission of the Business Plan presented as a deliverable in Stage 1.

**17: What if by the time of the evaluation of Teaming proposals the MS or region where the low performing applicant is coming from, has not yet finalised its Smart Specialisation Strategy (RIS3)?**

- The deadline for applications to the first Teaming call is on the 17<sup>th</sup> September 2014. Currently most S3 are in the final stages of preparation and are expected to be finalised by summer 2014. However, for those that will not be finalised by the summer, Member States are expected to submit an action plan outlining the modalities of the RIS3 strategies and the timeline of implementation.
- Having in mind the above, the Teaming call provides an extra incentive to Member States and regions to finalise their S3 strategies as soon as possible, since additionally to being an ex-ante conditionality for ESIF funding, alignment of a Teaming proposal with the RIS3 strategy of the MS/region is an essential evaluation criterion.

- In general, it would be preferential for the national/regional S3 strategies to be finalised by the time of evaluation of Teaming proposals (in Nov/Dec 2014). However, in those cases where most of the work has been done in terms of the preparation of the S3 or mature drafts have been made available and the relevant action plans mentioned above have been prepared, then the above could be used as the basis to assess the alignment of the Teaming proposal with the respective national/regional S3.

**18: Is there any requirement to "team up" with stronger or weaker regions in terms of innovation performance in low performing Member States?**

- There is no such requirement foreseen in the Work Programme. The WP text clearly states that the only eligibility criterion is that the low performing partner is established in one of the 15 low performing Member States or respective Associated Countries.

**19: Is there a preference between creating a new or upgrading an existing Centre of Excellence under a Teaming project?**

- The Work Programme clarifies that Teaming can both support establishing new or upgrading existing Centres of Excellence. It should be noted however that "new" can be a new Centre of Excellence within an established university/research institute in a low performing Member State.

**20: What about the commitment from the low performing partner for national ESIF funding. Is there a time span that this commitment should be lasting for?**

- In the course of preparation of the Business Plan in Stage 1 of a Teaming project, the national/regional authorities need to show strong commitments of future financial (national or ESIF) support for the new/upgraded Centre of Excellence. While the time span of the financial commitment is not pre-defined in the Work Programme, it is desirable to receive a strong commitment (also in terms of timing) from the national/regional authorities to ensure the long term sustainability of the future Centre.

**UPDATE as of 22/05/2014**

**21: What about the requirement for alignment with the national/regional Smart Specialisation Strategies (RIS3) if the low performing applicant is coming from an Associated Country?**

- Associated Countries do not benefit from Cohesion Policy funding and therefore do not have to produce an RIS3 as ex-ante ESIF conditionality. Thus the requirement for alignment with the RIS3 will not apply for ACs. However the low performing applicants for Teaming proposals coming from Associated Countries are encouraged to align to the priorities of their existing national/regional R&I Strategy, if there is one in place.

**22: Is there any limitation on the number of Teaming proposals submitted by each country? Is there a limitation in how many proposals an "advanced" partner can participate in?**

- There are no restrictions on the number of Teaming proposals by country, as long as the applicant is in the eligible low performing Member State or Associated Country.
- There is no limitation for an advanced partner to be involved in several Teaming projects.

**23: Is there an indication on what profile the evaluators will have? What are the evaluation criteria and their relative weighting?**

- The Commission will apply the appropriate expert selection and standard evaluation procedures in an open and transparent manner, according to the Commission's highest quality standards and known evaluation criteria (no hidden weightings).

**24: What sort of proof are applicants expected to submit in stage 1 of the process concerning the availability and commitment of funding to support the application?**

- Stage 1 application level: Regarding proof on financial commitment already in stage 1 application level, this would be indeed beneficial especially if the coordinator is not a national authority or national agency (i.e it is a university or research centre). At this stage, flexibility will be shown on the way applicants would demonstrate that financial commitment is guaranteed by the authorities.
- However please note that when producing the Business Plan (Deliverable for stage 1) as part of the project, this financial commitment has to be clearly demonstrated (ideally in the form of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Coordinator (if not a national/regional authority/agency) and the National/Regional authorities or any other authority with a sufficient budgetary impact on the project.

**25: What about eligible costs for a Teaming project?**

- For the first steps of implementation of the Centre of Excellence (stage 2 of Teaming projects) between €15-20 million will be available from H2020. Eligible costs for reimbursement from Horizon 2020 will include administrative and operational expenses including salaries of employees (researchers, managers etc.) of the centre of excellence. The Horizon 2020 contribution in stage 2 cannot be used for funding particular research projects since the funding instrument that will be used is in fact a Coordination and Support Action (CSA). The reimbursement rates for both Stage 1 and Stage 2 will be 100% of the eligible direct costs (and 25% of direct costs as a flat reimbursement for indirect costs) in line with the standard rules of Horizon 2020.

- However, please note that for large equipment or infrastructure at Stage 2 of the Teaming project, Horizon 2020 funds cannot be used, therefore a considerable amount of funding is needed to come from other sources. This could come from a relevant Operational Programme (OP) of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) (be it sectorial, national or regional). In this case, a national 'matching' contribution needs to be foreseen. In addition, when ESIF are used, the principle of avoiding double funding from the EU budget applies, meaning that costs that would be reimbursed in the context of the OP shall be different from the costs to be supported under Horizon 2020. Alternatively, other sources of funding may be used (public or private) without any ESIF involvement.

**26: Eligible costs and possible contributions of the "advanced" partner?**

- All partners' expenses in the project will be clearly reimbursed, including those coming from the side of the advanced partner(s) as also mentioned in question 8. Regarding possible contributions from the "advanced" partner, it is up to the partnership to decide if and how it would be elaborated in the proposal. However, as such a contribution would probably reinforce the long-term financial aspect of the partnership, it would be rather beneficial to have it elaborated in the proposal. Eligible expenses for the advanced partner are identical with those of the coordinator (salaries, travel, etc.).

**27: What about the long-term sustainability of the Teaming partnership?**

- It should be made clear to potential applicants that a Teaming project should be the result of a joint venture with a long term horizon of cooperation between the relevant partners from both the advanced and low performing sides.
- It is stressed that despite the fact that Horizon 2020 funding for the Centre of Excellence will stop after about 5 years, there is an expectation that a lot of effort will need to be placed by the partners in this joint venture, to continue supporting the new Centre in view of achieving sustainability in the long run and hopefully eventual financial autonomy with an ability to successfully compete for European and international funding programmes.