Webinar on "Implementing ERA-NET Cofund" Summary Q&A Session

On 16 December 2020, ERA-LEARN organised a webinar on "Implementing ERA-NET Cofund". This document is a summary of the Q&A Session.

Additional Activities

Q: Are half units or parts of units for a partner eligible?
A: No. You can only charge one full unit per partner and year – no half or partial units.

Q: Will participation in an additional call count as unit cost throughout the whole duration of that call (preparation, launch, evaluation, funding, follow-up of projects?)
A: This depends on the work plan of the ERA-NET Cofund. In principle an additional activity could be an additional call, including preparation, launch etc.

Q: The participation in additional activities is justified through meeting minutes, participation in additional joint calls; any other means?
A: The documentation will depend on the type of activities and needs to prove convincingly that the additional activities were really carried out and the individual beneficiaries really participated. Supporting documents that prove the involvement might be meeting minutes, lists of participants, presentation given, and reports produced connected to meetings etc.

Q: How do you deal with attendance lists in virtual events (absence of signed attendance lists)?
A: The tools used for the online meeting might have login-files or similar to prove the attendance. A screen-shot of names is also an option.

Q: A task leader of additional activities for 5 years will be entitled to 5 units, right?
A: This depends on the work programme and on the real involvement of the task leader. Just being a task leader of an additional activity without any proof of activity would not be sufficient.

Financial Management

Q: Does the EC allow the coordinator to transfer funds for coordination activities to Canada, for example?

A: Canada and other third countries are not eligible for EC cofunding. However, in some ERA-NET Cofunds it was agreed with the EC (in Grant Agreement) that Canada and/or other third countries are eligible for unit costs and therefore these beneficiaries can claim unit cost funding. In any case the distribution of funds to any beneficiaries for coordination activities is part of the internal financial management.

Q: Can Structural Funds be used for funding an ERA-NET, as a common pot, or does it have to be programmes in advanced and specified for each different ERA-NET programme?

A: In Horizon 2020, Structural Funds are not eligible for EC co-funding. However, Structural Funds can in principle be used in all joint calls of the ERA-NET Cofund. Nevertheless, the calculation of top-up funding for transnational projects in the cofunded call will not take into account any Structural Funds. Structural Funds are no basis for the calculation of the top-up funding.

Q: How can one assure that the Funding Organisations (FOs) have a responsible approach to avoid an unbalance in funding? Are there examples of excluding FOs, if the funding is not above a threshold? Which options have funders to ensure that "all" available funding can be spend?

A: It is essential to avoid an unbalanced oversubscription in the full proposal phase. To deal with that the following approaches have been applied:

- *Ensure appropriate national budgets*
- *Define rules for applicants to limit their number of participations*
- *Limited number of proposals to be invited to the full proposal stage (2-3.5 times the respective national budget)*
- *Increase national budgets if possible in case of high demand*

It is advisable to agree on measures before the call is launched. You could include rules in the consortium agreement for a situation where a beneficiary does not commit a reasonable budget for the transnational call. To ensure that the available budget can be spent it is important to have a long ranking list on the one hand and enough good proposals (response to the call) on the other hand. The latter can be improved by consultation services, brokerage events etc. (see some examples in a report: https://www.era-learn.eu/documents/era-learn_inclusiveness-in-european-r-and-i-partnership-programme.pdf

Joint call

Q: If there is only a one step procedure, is there a way to rule out proposals that are not entirely in scope.
A: Whereas the co-funded call has to follow a 2-step procedure (see https://www.era-learn.eu/support-for-partnerships/cofunded-p2p/era-net-cofund/era-net-cofund-under-horizon-2020-2013-background-information/what-are-the-conditions-for-the-implementation-of-the-co-funded-call) a one-step procedure is possible in non-cofunded calls and the specific evaluation process including eligibility checks should be clearly defined in the consortium agreement.

Q: The ranking list has to be endorsed by the consortium following decisions by consensus (100%). If consensus cannot be achieved, decisions shall be taken by a majority of two-thirds (2/3) of the votes cast as described in Consortium Agreement, right?
A: The consortium has to follow the ranking list when selecting the trans-national projects. The decision process has to be defined in the Consortium Agreement.

Q: The selection of proposals for funding has to follow the ranking list of the evaluation panel. Can proposals be ranked equal or in groups? Does the commission accept a ranking list with categories (e.g. A++, A+, etc.) so that only after all A++ projects are supported, then proposals with A+ can be supported until exhaustion of budget?
A: Proposals with equal scores can be included in one group. You need to fund all proposals in one group before considering funding the ones in the next group. Categories (e.g. "A+, etc) are usually based on scores.

Q: 30 days before the call publication, the call text must be sent to EC, or must be approved?
A: Yes, see Model Grant Agreement: „19.1 Obligation to submit deliverables: The coordinator must submit: - at least 30 days before the expected date of publication of the joint call: information on the call and its content". An approvement is advisable before launching the call.

Q: When/ in which phase does the independent observer need to be included from the opening of the call?
A: See Model Grant Agreement: "The selection procedure must be followed by an independent expert observer, who must make a report". The observer must follow the whole process of full proposal evaluation and selection but can also be involved before.

Q: Are the experts receiving an evaluation fee? Which amount is recommended?
A: This is up to the individual ERA-NET Cofund. In some networks no fees are paid to the evaluators others pay fees. These costs are non-eligible and are part of the internal arrangements, which should be fixed in the consortium agreement.

Q: How do the experts have access to the proposals - through an evaluation tool?
A: Common practice in ERA-NET Cofunds is the use of an access-restricted evaluation tool (data protection).

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Q: For full-proposal evaluation, can you also ask the evaluators to consider further questions as for example on "relevance to the call"?

A: For the cofunded call the following three main evaluation criteria are mandatory: (a) excellence; (b) impact; (c) quality and efficiency of the implementation. Relevance to the call is normally discussed under the criteria "excellence".

Other issues

Q: Is there going to be a webinar with emphasis on reporting and implementing ERA-NET Type C (in-kind; exceptional cases)?

A: A dedicated workshop is not planned. ERA-LEARN provides slides covering in-kind baseed ERA-NET Cofunds: https://www.era-learn.eu/documents/in_kind_cofund_092016.pdf

Q: Is there any material on Commission's procedures e.g. on project review meetings at the end of an ERA-NET Cofund?

A: ERA-Net Cofunds are included in the Indicative Audit Programme: https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/other/gm/audit/h2020-iap_en.pdf, More information on the EC procedures is available in the "H2020 Online Manual": https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/docs/h2020-funding-guide/grants/grant-management/checks-audits-reviews-investigations_en.htm

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Further information on ERA-NET Cofund

ERA-NET Cofund: https://www.era-learn.eu/support-for-partnerships/cofunded-p2p/era-net-cofund

Joint Calls: https://www.era-learn.eu/support-for-partnerships/implementing-joint-calls

FAQs provided by EC: https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/docs/h2020-funding-guide/cross-cutting-issues/era-net_en.htm

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