

Webinar “Preparing co-funded European Partnerships”

4 March 2021

This document summarises the Q&A sessions of the ERA-LEARN webinar on "Preparing co-funded European Partnerships", 4 March 2021.

Strategic Coordinating Process

Q: What is the constitution of the EC expert group on the support for the Strategic Coordinating Process for Partnerships?

A: *9 experts have been appointed. Details are available here:*

<https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regexpert/index.cfm?do=groupDetail.groupDetail&groupID=3738&NewSearch=1&NewSearch=1>

Q: How is complementarity between calls of Horizon Europe and Partnerships being ensured?

A: *The involved EC colleagues have an important role in overseeing that the Horizon Europe 'main' work programmes do not overlap with partnership work plans and are complementary.*

Q: What about coherence and synergies between Partnerships?

A: *A report on “Coherence and Synergies of candidate European Partnerships under Horizon Europe” was published and is available for download:*

https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/research_and_innovation/funding/documents/ec_rtd_coherence-synergies-of-ep-under-he.pdf

Synergies with Cohesion Policy Funds

Q: Are Cohesion Policy Funds which are used by individual countries as a contribution to a European Partnership eligible for EU co-funding?

A: *Yes, thanks to the new provision in Article 15 (3) of Horizon Europe, Member States can use resources co-financed from ERDF, ESF+, European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) and European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) as national contribution to the participation in Co-funded and Institutionalised European Partnerships, provided it complies with Common Provisions and fund-specific regulations.*

Q: At what level in the Cohesion Policy Funds planning process do you need to define that you intend to use them for the Partnerships?

A: *Alignment with Smart Specialisation Strategies is an eligibility condition for the ERDF programmes. Managing Authorities and National/Regional Stakeholders should therefore identify R&I priorities in compliance with S3 priorities and planning of appropriate cohesion policy funds measures. The drafting of the operational programmes is still ongoing and a revision of the Smart Specialization Strategies as well, therefore this is a good moment for considering the participation in a European Partnership. It is important to identify topics and research objectives and identify those Partnerships, which can bring added value to the economic impact, excellence and societal challenges of related territories, in line with their Smart Specialisation Strategy.*

Q: Can regional funds from one region grant funds to grant holders from other regions?

A: *No, Cohesion Policy Funds may be used only for the benefit of beneficiaries applying from the related region.*

Q: Is the EU co-funding budget transferred to the managing authorities?

A: *This depends on who is signing the Grant Agreement. Regions as managing authorities can participate in co-funded calls by signing the Grant Agreement but can also appoint an intermediate body such as a funding organisation acting as programme manager. The intermediary body will be then able to select calls, while making sure that CPR rules are applied. The EU co-funding will be always transferred via the coordinator to the consortium members, i.e. those signing the GA.*

Q: How do the de-minimis rules fit with combining ERDF and Horizon Europe?

A: *The use of Cohesion policy funds requires the compliance with the State Aid Rules.*

In the case of Co-funded European Partnerships, the funding awarded to the final beneficiary is provided according to the national rules in line with State aid requirements.

Currently a specific amendment of the General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER) has been proposed and is still under finalisation. Its approval will simplify the use of Cohesion Policy Funds under certain conditions and will made easier the funding of European Partnership projects (if the national authority decides to do so).

To bring an example - as transnational calls in a co-funded European Partnership follow HE rules ensuring independent selection, ranking and evaluation then the national granting authority does not have need to reassess eligibility conditions. It could then decide to use Horizon Europe programme rules for project stemming from partnership transnational calls, in line with GBER Article 25c (e.g. using the categories, maximum amounts and methods of calculation of eligible costs as defined eligible under Horizon Europe programme rules). This means that there would be no need for a separate state aid assessment and notification.

Timeline / Proposal submission & evaluation process

Q: When will the Horizon Europe Work Programmes 2021/22 be published? When will be the deadlines for submitting partnership proposals? Is more than one proposal expected for a particular partnership topic? Which Partnerships will start within the first wave?

A: *The Work Programmes of Horizon Europe with the calls for the co-funded Partnerships are planned to be published in May 2021. Not all topics (for the co-funded Partnerships) will have exactly the same deadline. One proposal per topic is expected since all Member states / Associated states should have the opportunity to join a partnership. The 49 candidates are shown on slide 12 (https://www.era-learn.eu/news-events/events/preparing-co-funded-european-Partnerships/slides_era-learnworkshop_co-fundedPartnerships_20210304.pdf). The following co-funded Partnerships will start with the first wave: *) Transformation of health systems; *) Chemicals risk assessment; *) ERA for Health; *) Clean Energy Transition; *) Driving Urban Transitions; *) Rescuing Biodiversity to Safeguard Life on Earth; *) Climate Neutral, Sustainable & Productive Blue Economy; *) Water4All; *) Innovative SMEs*

Q: Who will evaluate the partnership proposals? What are the evaluation criteria for partnership proposals?

A: *There will be a central evaluation organised by the EC with a minimum of 3 (most probably five) experts for each proposal. To ensure consistency a pool of experts will evaluate the partnership proposals (with a mix of thematic as well as Partnership knowhow); the EC will try to group the proposals and evaluate them together; each expert will evaluate more than one proposal.*

Q: What is the timeline between the start of Partnerships and the publication of calls? How many co-funded Partnerships will organise calls in 2021 or 2022?

A: *Partnerships will start as soon as the respective Grant Agreement is signed by both parties. An optional fixed starting date is possible, however not before the date of submission of the proposal. In duly justified cases and when provided for in the specific call conditions retroactive starting date is possible.*

Q: Is it possible for Partnerships to start calls earlier, is there a possibility for retroactive funding?

A: *The starting date must normally be the first day of a month and later than the entry into force of the agreement. The Commission can decide on another date, if justified by the applicants. However, the starting date may not be earlier than the submission date of the grant application – except if provided for in the specific call conditions.*

Partnership constitution and governance

Q: Who will be the beneficiaries/partners in the Partnerships?

A: *The consortium composition will depend on the objectives of the individual Partnerships. The new approach to Partnerships under Horizon Europe means that they are open to a broader target group than the former ERA-NET Co-fund networks. Beneficiaries can be programme owners, programme managers or other entities.*

Q: How can institutions be associated to activities without being formal consortium members?

A: *There are various ways of participating in projects without signing the grant agreement. Entities may participate as affiliated entities (called linked third parties in Horizon 2020) if – and only if – they have a legal or capital link with one of the beneficiaries. Affiliated entities carry out work in the project and may declare costs. Entities may also participate as associated partners. Associated partners carry out work in the project but cannot declare costs. Entities may also participate as third parties providing contributions. These third parties do not carry out work in the project – they just give in-kind contributions – and the beneficiary they provide the contributions to declares the costs of the contributions. And finally, entities may participate as subcontractors who carry out work on the project and invoice the beneficiary who may declare the invoice to the project.*

Q: Will funding from international partners be part of the calculation for the EU co-funding?

A: *Only the costs of entities eligible for funding count towards the co-funding rate. Some “international partners” (understood as legal entities established in non-associated third countries) may be eligible whereas others are not. The EU co-funding rate will be applied on the total eligible costs of each beneficiary.*

Q: Are derogations for international participants foreseen?

A: *This depends on the actual role of the legal entity in the project. If they participate as associated partners (called international partners in Horizon 2020), they must implement the action tasks attributed to them. They may not charge costs or contributions to the action and the costs for their tasks are not eligible. The beneficiaries must ensure that their contractual obligations under Articles 11 (proper implementation), 12 (conflict of interests), 13 (confidentiality and security), 14 (ethics), 17.2 (visibility), 18 (specific rules for carrying out action), 19 (information) and 20 (record-keeping) also apply to the associated partners. The beneficiaries must ensure that the bodies mentioned in Article 25 (e.g. granting authority, OLAF, Court of Auditors (ECA), etc.) can exercise their rights also towards the associated partners.*

Q: Can Research Performing Organisations act as associated partners within a partnership, without creating a conflict of interest related to submitting proposals to calls later on?

A: *See page 30 of the slides for details on conflict of interest; this also applies for third parties.*

Q: Does the annual work plan need to be submitted via the participant portal? Is it part of the Grant Agreement?

A: Yes, the annual work plan will be a deliverable listed in the Grant Agreement.

Q: Costs will be defined in advance in the Grant Agreement but depend on the actual activities described in the annual work plan. How will both documents come together?

A: The annual work plan will be submitted as a deliverable in the continuous reporting module in the Portal. The costs will be reported through in the financial statements on the Portal as part of the periodic reporting, typically every 18 month.

Financial governance: funding rates, eligible costs, in-kind contribution

Q: How is the EU co-funding calculated?

A: The EU co-funding will be determined on the basis of eligible costs. These will depend on activities defined in the Grant Agreement.

Q: What is the rationale behind different funding rates? Which Partnerships will receive 30% or 50% co-funding?

A: The funding rate for a particular partnership will depend on the variety and ambition of the activities. If the main activity of a partnership is the implementation of joint calls the funding rate will be up to 30%. In exceptional cases, for some partnerships where a broad range of ambitious other activities is implemented, the funding rate may be up to 50%. However, these will likely be very few cases. It is important to understand that the funding rate can under no circumstances change during the project implementation. The initially set funding rate will stay the same throughout the duration of the Grant Agreement.

Q: Are there different funding rates for different activities?

A: There will be only one funding rate for each Grant Agreement. However, consortia can decide internally how to distribute the EU co-funding. It can be decided to apply a higher internal funding rate to some activities while decreasing the internal funding rates for other activities.

Q: Is a variety of internal funding rates recommendable?

A: This is an internal matter of the consortium. Consortia are advised to keep things simple.

Q: Is there an indirect cost flat rate (25%) on subcontracting?

A: There is no flat rate for indirect costs on top of subcontracting (and on financial support to third parties).

Q: What do eligible costs mean with regard to cash contribution?

A: This cost category is listed in the Grant Agreement and is related to the financial support to third parties, i.e. funded transnational RTD projects. Activities have to be carried out during the duration of the Grant Agreement and will generate a 30% EU co-funding on paid amounts.

Q: Explain the concept of in-kind contributions.

A: In the partnership preparation phase the EC asked the Member States for their indicative contributions (cash and in-kind) as a basis for calculating the EU co-funding. Submitted proposals have to distinguish different budget categories. Any direct expenditure of a consortium member for activities that are needed to reach the objectives of the Grant Agreement (e.g. governance, training...; other than providing financial support to third parties) is, in principle, an in-kind contribution.

Joint Calls

Q: How many calls will be co-funded?

A: More than one co-funded call will be possible in one Grant Agreement; typically one call per year is expected.

Q: Are joint calls between Partnerships possible and are there examples of such joint calls?

A: Joint calls between Partnerships are difficult since there is one separate Grant Agreement for each partnership and the costs will be eligible only for the specific GA. However, there are examples of joint calls between Partnerships without involving EU co-funding.

Q: Can proposal selection criteria be added to the obligatory criteria?

A: The criteria for the selection of projects in co-funded calls are mandatory (see slides 63-65). All criteria need to be followed to create eligible costs, otherwise the incurred costs will become non-eligible. The call text has to be submitted to the EC before the call is launched. It is still possible to have even stricter criteria. You need to stick to the Model Grant Agreement Annex 5.

Q: Can private companies contribute to calls?

A: It is allowed that private companies contribute to the calls.

Q: Do all partners have to participate in all calls?

A: No, there is no obligation that all partners contribute to all calls, depending e.g. on topics or available budgets. In general, all calls should be open to all partners, no closed clubs.

Q: Is it possible to have more than one ranking list in a call?

A: Having one ranking list is the easiest way; more ranking lists are not recommended. In the end the final product needs to be one ranking list.

Q: Can international partners participate in the co-funded calls?

A: Yes, but if they are not eligible for co-funding they need to have a sufficient budget available to avoid blocking the ranking list.

Reporting and data management

Q: Is data management part of the reporting?

A: *A complete set of data on proposals and projects needs to be delivered by all Partnerships under Horizon Europe. This will be done via a defined interface. Pilots are currently implemented.*

Q: What about the eligibility of costs related to calls in the final years of a partnership? What if payments to funded projects have not been completed when the partnership Grant Agreement ends?

A: *H2020: only costs incurred during the GA were eligible, therefore only the first call could be co-funded so that all payments could be made within 5 years. Horizon Europe: costs incurred during the duration of the grant agreement are eligible. The Commission is currently looking into how to address this issue more concretely.*

Other issues

Q: Can Partnerships continue after the end of Horizon Europe?

A: *Yes, the partnership duration is defined in the Grant Agreement and exceed the life time of Horizon Europe. Likewise, there are H2020 initiatives that are still running even though H2020 has ended.*

Q: Can the call management be subcontracted?

A: *None of key activities can be subcontracted. Subcontractors may participate in the action as described under article 9.3 Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement*
https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/agr-contr/general-mga_horizon- Euratom_en.pdf.

Q: Is there a strict division in the tasks between the DGs and REA considering the acceptance of the Grant Agreement and annual work programmes?

A: *Policy tasks will be with the DGs; all grants will be managed by the implementation agency.*

Further information on European Partnerships

<https://www.era-learn.eu/Partnerships-in-a-nutshell/european-Partnerships>

<https://www.era-learn.eu/Partnerships-in-a-nutshell/type-of-networks>

https://ec.europa.eu/info/horizon-europe/european-Partnerships-horizon-europe_en

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