

Q&A Summary

Implementing Co-funded European Partnerships:
a Training Workshop for Newcomers, Sept 2025

19/01/2026

Q&A summary of the newcomers' training workshop on "Implementing Co-funded European Partnerships", 29-30 September 2025

ERA-LEARN and the European Commission organised a training workshop for newcomers on implementing co-funded European Partnerships, which took place in Rome. The workshop provided a comprehensive overview of issues related to the preparation and implementation of co-funded European Partnerships. Plenary sessions, including presentations by the European Commission, ERA-LEARN and partnership representatives were live-streamed. In-person group work allowed on-site attendees to meet experts and to network, to dig deeper, gain insights and clarify open questions.

This document summarises the questions raised and answers given during the workshop. Further information and workshop materials (including agenda, slides and recordings) are available on the dedicated [ERA LEARN event page](#).

General aspects

Q: What is the difference between co-funded and institutionalised partnerships?

A: The key difference lies in the implementation structure. Institutionalised, or treaty-based partnerships, are implemented through dedicated bodies (for example, Joint Undertakings) with a deeper level of integration and a distinct legal basis (Art. 185/187 of TFEU and the EIT legal acts for 2021-2027). Partnerships under Art. 185 involve public-public networks with Member States and Associated States leading the partnership, while Art. 187 allows networks to partner up with both the private sector (e.g. industry associations) and public partners (such as the Chips Joint Undertaking). Co-funded partnerships, on the other hand, are established through a Grant Agreement between a consortium of partners and the EU, following the successful submission of a proposal under a Horizon Europe Work Programme topic.

Q: Is it correct that co-funded partnerships are absent from the FP10 proposal?

A: In the [proposal of the European Commission for Horizon Europe 2028-2034](#), one default implementation format for European Partnerships is suggested, which will integrate the two current work programme-based implementation forms, i.e. co-programmed and co-funded. The proposal foresees that they will be based on a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and be implemented via the future Horizon Europe work programme. The principle of co-funded partnerships – co-programming and co-funding joint R&I programmes with national and regional funders - remains, but would be implemented differently, addressing implementation challenges encountered by co-funded partnerships today. The option of establishing treaty-based instruments in exceptional and well-justified cases also remains.

Q: Which role can a region play in a European Partnership?

A: European Partnerships can represent an entry point for regions to engage in European cooperation and strategic research and innovation initiatives. Partnerships should not be viewed only as joint financing instruments, but as a strategic instrument contributing to the design and implementation of public policies. Regions can set their own strategic priorities in line with the partnership calls. They may choose to finance only specific priorities or topics within a partnership, depending on their regional strategies. Regions could use the opportunity to take advantage of the partnership results by following up with structural funds (e.g. ERDF) and finance complementary or derived projects that continue partnership outcomes.

Legal requirements - Grant Agreement

Preparing the co-funded partnership proposal

Q: Which organisations are eligible to become beneficiaries of co-funded partnerships? What criteria must beneficiaries meet to participate in partnerships? For example, are EU member state organisations eligible, or are there other geographical criteria? What about organisation types, e.g. private or public?

A: The Horizon Europe Regulation (Art. 2(36)) states that programme co-fund actions are implemented by “legal entities managing or funding R&I programmes,” so any legal entity that is eligible for funding may become a beneficiary of a programme co-fund action implementing a co-funded partnership. Which countries are eligible for funding is described in [Annex B](#) of the Horizon Europe Work Programme General Annexes. Specific eligibility conditions may be included in the respective call text.

However, in co-funded partnerships, national/regional funding bodies/agencies and ministries are usually acting as the core group of beneficiaries, but research performing organisation and private organisations might also be involved in the consortium. The important point is that the consortium is able to implement the work as proposed under the partnership.

Information on organisations involved in existing co-funded partnerships can be found in the [ERA LEARN database](#).

Q: What are the European Commission's recommendations on the use of AI tools in proposals and assessments?

A: There are no restrictions in AI use in proposal preparation, however, applicants take full responsibility for the contents of the proposal, and are expected to check and ensure that there are no errors introduced due to AI use.

Applicants can use AI to prepare a proposal, but expert evaluators may not use such tools when evaluating a proposal.

Q: When writing the proposal, it is often difficult to anticipate certain aspects (e.g. governance structures or additional activities intended to complement and build upon project results). How should this be addressed?

A: Minor changes such as smaller budget transfers between beneficiaries are acceptable during the implementation of the grant, but details should always be discussed with the responsible Project Officer in the respective Executive Agency.

However, changes in the work plan (Description of the Action - Annex 1) need to be addressed through amendments to the Grant Agreement, which is the main mechanism for introducing changes during implementation. Proposed changes should always be discussed in detail with the Project Officer before the official submission of the amendment request.

The Horizon Europe Grant Agreement

Q: For co-funded partnerships, the evaluation process may extend beyond the Commission's usual time-to-grant, and a retroactive starting date may occasionally be used to accommodate this. How does a retroactive starting date work in practice?

A: In principle, a retroactive starting date is possible, but this possibility must be foreseen in the call conditions, and cannot be before the submission date of the proposal, or in exceptional cases, the call deadline.

It should be noted that if a partnership begins implementing activities before the successful conclusion of the proposal evaluation, it does so at its own risk. Should the proposal not be successful, no costs can be reimbursed, regardless of whether a retroactive starting date had been envisaged.

Q: There is no official template for preparing a Consortium Agreement (CA). Is it foreseen to provide a unified CA template in the future?

A: The European Commission does not provide a template for CAs, but has made [general guidance](#) available.

In addition, ERA-LEARN provides a [model CA specifically for co-funded partnerships](#), which may serve as useful inspiration.

Implementation of the co-funded partnership: financial support to third parties (FSTP) calls and other activities

Q: For FSTP funding there is normally a ceiling of EUR 60.000 – does this apply to co-funded partnerships?

A: There is such a ceiling set in the EU financial regulation. However, co-funded partnerships are treated as exceptional cases, as their main activity is to provide FSTP and their lifespan is much longer than a regular Horizon Europe project. Thus, this ceiling does not usually apply to co-funded partnerships, and the applicable ceiling (typically much higher than EUR 60.000) is defined in the respective call conditions for the programme co-fund action that will implement the partnership. The applicable ceiling is then also reflected in the Grant Agreement.

Q: FSTP calls must be open for 60 days. In two-step procedures, does the 60-days rule apply to both steps?

A: The minimum 60-day period applies from FSTP call announcement to the final call deadline (second step). Further details can be provided in Annex 5 of the [Annotated Model Grant Agreement \(Specific rules for HE Co-funded European Partnerships\)](#).

Q: Which award/evaluation criteria need to be used in FSTP calls?

The evaluation of FSTP calls must apply the same award/evaluation criteria as Horizon Europe calls, namely Excellence, Impact, Quality and Efficiency of the Implementation. Specific details for programme co-funded actions are provided under [Part D of the Horizon Europe Work Programme General annexes](#).

The applicable criteria depend on the type of action concerned, for example, for Research and Innovation Actions (RIAs), the award criteria defined for RIAs under Horizon Europe must be used.

Q: Step 2 of the evaluation procedure in FSTP calls involves the assistance of three independent experts. What does 'independent' mean? What are the requirements for being considered independent?

A: Independence means not linked to the beneficiaries of the actions. They must not have any connections to these entities.

Q: Which Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) are possible for the transnational projects funded in a FSTP call of a co-funded partnership?

A: The partnership members agree among themselves what type of projects should be financed. This is also part of the Description of Action (Grant Agreement). There is no need for each funding agency to support the same level of TRLs in a joint call. National funding rules can be applied.

Q: EU Grant Agreements include obligations such as “giving visibility to EU funding as appropriate”. Is it mandatory that contracts from beneficiaries to third parties have such obligations expressed in writing?

A: The safest approach is to include these obligations in a written agreement with the final recipients of EU funding. An audit may check that the obligations are extended to final recipients. If a final recipient does not comply with these obligations, the final responsibility will fall on the coordinator of the partnership. Therefore, it is recommended that such obligations are included in the Financial Agreement with the final beneficiaries.

Q: Do in-kind contributions generate EU co-funding or are only own resources co-funded?

A: Under co-funded partnership, in-kind contributions "free of charge" (within the meaning of Article 2(38) of the EU Financial Regulation 2024/2509, i.e. non-financial resources made available free of charge by third parties) can also be charged to the project and contribute to the total cost of the project, based on which reimbursement rate applies.

In-kind contributions provided by third parties free-of charge may be declared as eligible direct costs by the beneficiaries that use them (under the same conditions as if they were their own), provided that they concern only direct costs and that the third parties and their in-kind contributions are set out in Annex 1 (or approved ex-post in the periodic report, if their use does not entail changes to the Agreement, which would call into question the decision awarding the grant or breach the principle of equal treatment of applicants; 'simplified approval procedure').

Further guidance on [FSTP in EU grants is available here](#).

However, in the context of co-funded European Partnerships, the term "in-kind contributions" is sometimes (wrongly) used to refer to additional, non-call activities. Such additional activities are eligible for funding as well, provided that they comply with the eligible cost categories laid out in the Model Grant Agreement, contribute to the objectives of the partnership, and are included in work plans.

Conflicts of Interest (Col)

Q: What is meant by conflicts of interests?

A: In principle, beneficiaries (member of the consortium) of the EU grant can NOT also be final recipients of FSTP (financial support to third parties). However, there are cases where exceptions are permitted, under certain conditions.

To make the funding of beneficiaries, which are also Research Performing Organisations, through FSTP possible, they shall not take part in work streams connected to the preparation of FSTP actions (the call preparation etc.). When preparing a proposal for a co-funded partnership, all beneficiaries in such a situation must be clearly identified, and sufficient internal firewalls or information barriers must be put into place to prevent conflict of interests.

Q: At which stage does the European Commission agree that the proposed procedure of dealing with conflicts of interests is good enough?

A: The affected entities must be identified, and the procedures to ensure appropriate firewalls are in place must be explained in the proposal; this will be assessed as part of the evaluation. In cases where the procedure is defined after the proposal submission, the coordinator must contact the Project Officer. An amendment of the Grant Agreement will be needed to include the suggested procedure.

Q: Can external experts be involved in drafting the call text without disqualifying their home institution from applying for the FSTP call?

A: When experts evaluate projects in the FSTP calls, they sign a confidentiality agreement (following the procedures in their organisation). Normally, in such a case, the experts' organisations cannot be an applicant to the same call, as it is necessary to avoid conflict of interest and ensure confidentiality. Exceptional cases may apply, as described under the question referring to the conflict of interest concerning information barrier and internal firewalls.

Examples of co-funded partnerships – workplan, governance, call management

Q: How does the example partnership finance its own IT "budget tool"? Can this be part of the call secretariat budget in the GA?

A: The example budget tool is an excel sheet. No extra costs had to be charged to the project.

Q: Are the described measures (fallback mechanism, inclusion procedure, etc.) specific, or is each partnership free to implement similar measures?

A: Although they are specific, similar measures can be implemented by each partnership. These measures need to be adapted depending on the partnership.

Q: Were the measures to avoid oversubscription written in advance in the proposal of the co-funded partnership or decided at a later stage?

A: The proposal of the co-funded partnership outlined the idea of the measures, but not in detail. The specific solutions were developed during the implementation phase, once the results of the FTSP call were known.

Q: What is a good number of oversubscription rate and how do you deal with decreasing budgets of the FSTP calls?

A: The example partnership started with an oversubscription rate of 3 and for those that do not get any EU-co-funding with 2 and later increased to 4 and 3 respectively. Higher rates tend to be inefficient. Other partnerships use similar figures.

Concerning the budget decrease: unforeseen changes, such as dropouts or the entry of additional funding agencies, are normal. Using the budget efficiently is the more important objective. Partnerships deal with long-term budgets based on assumptions; therefore, the absolute budget level is less critical than using the available budget efficiently. Flexibility is essential.

Q: Funded researchers always liked that they are somewhere in between the EU funding programme and the national programme. Is this still the same in co-funded partnerships?

A: That is indeed common feedback. Even if it is complex to navigate the consortium, they know how to handle the funding process at a national level. Therefore, the actual effort for applicants remained the same, and the administrative burden falls on the partnerships' side.

Q. Is it mandatory for the final beneficiaries to sign a consortium agreement (CA)?

A: The example partnership has a mandatory milestone in the Grant Agreement. Signing a consortium agreement is strongly recommended and, in that case, it is a mandatory part of the work plan to collect the signed CAs.

Financial requirements of the Grant Agreement

Q: Does the interim payment only take place at the end of the process, and before that are there only pre-financing instalments?

A: There are the pre-financing and then interim payments, which are connected to the reporting phases.

In some cases, where co-funded partnerships have undergone so-called top-up calls and amendments to increase the Union contribution to a GA, there are additional pre-financing arrangements and the first interim payment was prolonged. The top-up amendment triggered the additional prefinancing, which was connected to reduced reporting obligations.

The multiple pre-financing approach was used before the European Commission enabled the use of annual instalments for co-funded partnerships, as of the Work Programme 2025. For partnerships launched in Work Programme 2025, a standard approach is foreseen (single pre-financing, interim payments, final payment).

Q: Concerning the budget phases of co-funded partnerships, is it possible to shift budgets?

A: This is only possible in exceptional cases and requires an amendment of the Description of the Action. The Granting Authority needs to agree.

Q: Is there no lump sum available in co-funded partnerships?

A: For co-funded partnerships, actual costs need to be reported. The use of unit costs, as in ERA-NET Cofunds, was discontinued under Horizon Europe.

Q: Is it correct that all costs declared in the Financial Statements must comply with the eligibility requirements under HE, considering that the reimbursement rate is 30%?

A: All costs are indeed reimbursed with the single funding rate, applicable to your action (usually 30% for co-funded partnerships). Only eligible costs can be co-funded.

Q: How and where should additional or “in-house activities” be reported?

A: “In-house” or additional activities should be reported as normal project costs, in line with the eligible cost categories laid out in the Model Grant Agreement. Of course, only costs incurred when carrying out the action are eligible.

Q: Should the partnership present the costs of additional or “in-house activities” separately in the periodic report?

A: As with any other cost, they should be reported under the respective cost category set out in the Model Grant Agreement. For example, personnel costs should be reported under the personnel cost category, and purchase-related costs under the purchase cost category.

Q: Does the partnership need to expend 70% of the EU funding (pre-financing) in order to receive the interim payment?

A: There is a need to demonstrate that 70% of the prefinancing has been consumed. Otherwise, the payment would be calculated subtracting the unused amount. As the Annotated Model Grant Agreement states (Art. 22.3.1), where FSTP is used, commitments entered into by beneficiaries vis-à-vis their third parties receiving financial support can be included in the 'additional prefinancing report' for the purpose of calculating the 70% usage threshold, even if no payments have been made, provided it is the usual accounting practice of the beneficiaries to consider the corresponding amounts as committed/used and thus no longer available for other purposes.

Q: Which articles govern the Mutual Insurance Mechanism (MIM)?

A: The Mutual Insurance Mechanism (MIM) is a common fund that protects the EU budget; beneficiaries typically contribute 5% of the maximum grant amount, retained from the pre-financing and cleared at the final payment. Details are provided in the [Annotated Grant Agreement](#). It is meant to set aside an amount to protect the financial interest of the Union and cover potential losses, such as a beneficiary declaring bankruptcy. The MIM also helps protect consortia, as it is used to cover amounts due in case of recoveries, meaning that other beneficiaries are normally not required to cover financial losses unless the MIM is insufficient.

Q: If a beneficiary participates in the MIM, wouldn't the 5% be considered part of the pre-financing usage and thus count toward the 70% utilisation requirement?

A: For the purpose of the 70% usage threshold, the relevant amount is the prefinancing as defined in the Grant Agreement.

Q: Why are additional activities not in-kind activities?

A: In-kind contributions have a specific definition set out in the Financial Regulation, which also applies to Horizon Europe, i.e. it is used for non-financial resources made available free of charge by third parties. For co-funded partnerships under Horizon Europe, the Grant Agreement allows beneficiaries to charge these costs even if they are free of charge.

Additional activities in co-funded partnerships encompass all non-call activities that are necessary to implement the action, and can be reimbursed if they fulfil the requirements and fit into the cost categories set out in the Model Grant Agreement.

All other incurred costs are against payment (e.g. personnel costs for seconded staff). Costs must be related to the Description of Work and be necessary for the implementation of the action and compliant with the Grant Agreement.

Q: In order to make to make full use of the planned project budget, can Research Performing Organisations (RPOs) charge more costs to the co-funded partnerships when the funding organisation has fewer costs to charge under FSTP?

A: All participants must follow the provisions of the Grant Agreement when implementing a co-funded partnership. Beneficiaries may be reimbursed for eligible incurred costs foreseen in the Grant Agreement and that are necessary to implement the partnership. Should the actions and resulting costs of any beneficiary change significantly, this should be discussed with the responsible Project Officer and may require an amendment of the Grant Agreement.

Q: What happens when less FSTP was paid out than planned?

A: In that case, partners will have fewer costs to report as eligible cost under FSTP and the related EU-funding will be reduced accordingly.

The earlier reference considered only the pre-financing. The committed amount for FSTP is considered as blocked by Executive Agencies and, therefore, counts towards the 70% consumption of the prefinancing.

When fewer costs are incurred, this is reflected in the reporting and in the resulting payment.

Q: The example partnership implemented three top-up amendments in its co-funded arrangement. There is a request to keep the budget phases separate — how should this partnership report the costs given that the EU Portal treats the partnership as a single project?

A: Partnerships in these cases need to provide a global cost statement and, if applicable, a Certificate on the Financial Statement (CFS) on the reported costs, including a split across the different budget phases. This can be added in the narrative part of the report. The level of detail that should be provided shall not differ from one partnership to the other. The Executive Agencies will try to make this as consistent as possible.

Q: Is there a limit to the EU contribution that a Funding Agency may receive within the co-funded partnerships (“juste retour”)?

A: There is no predefined limit to the EU contribution that a Funding Agency may receive. The distribution of EU contribution among Funding Agencies is defined at consortium level, generally with arrangements that are described in the Consortium Agreement (CA). Some partnerships, for example, agreed that the EU funding for one agency should not exceed twice the amount of its national/regional contribution.

Examples of co-funded partnerships – financial management

Q: How does the example partnership report the reserve fund to the European Commission?

A: Only costs can be reported to the European Commission. The reserve fund mentioned in the example belongs to the internal redistribution of EU-funding based on arrangements agreed within the Consortium Agreement. Since the reserve fund does not generate costs, it cannot be reported to the European Commission.

Q: How does the partnership reserve budget for new partners to join after the Grant Agreement has been signed? Can new partners joining via an amendment receive an EU top-up in FSTP calls?

A: When a new beneficiary joins the consortium, an amendment to the Grant Agreement is required. The maximum EU contribution will not be increased. However, the consortium may agree, through the amendment, on a redistribution of the existing budget. Whether a new partner receives EU-top-up in a FSTP call or not is, therefore, up to the consortium's internal arrangements. In most cases, the new partner will need to cover the FSTP costs with own resources.

The only exception may be when additional partners join through a top-up call and a resulting amendment (where a new proposal outlining new partners and activities triggers another evaluation and, if successful, may result in an increased Union contribution).

Q: What proportion of the EU contribution does the example partnership dedicate to calls versus additional activities?

A: When preparing its proposal, the example partnership outlined the planned activities and their respective budget allocations. Subsequently, the partnership met with all the partners taking part to decide which expenses should be covered by the EU contribution. It was agreed that travel costs would be reimbursed. Although an initial scenario had proposed reimbursing 50% of personnel costs, the partners deemed this to be insufficient. Consequently, the example partnership assessed the financial implications of increasing the reimbursement rate to 60% of personnel costs, and a consensus was reached to allocate €3 million from the EU contribution to each call. In this case, the call budget can be sufficiently complemented by national funders. While it is possible to attract additional funders, reimbursing travel and personnel costs was considered more important.

Q: At what point in time did the example partnership start discussions regarding the internal arrangements and did they ever face potential partners dropping out?

A: Approximately one year before submitting its proposal, the example partnership presented a scenario to its core team. Subsequently, the partnership established the consortium and reached agreements at the country level two months prior to proposal submission. Achieving these agreements was essential, as they formed part of the Consortium Agreement, which

needs to be finalised before signing the Grant Agreement. From the partnership's perspective, it is crucial to address such matters as early as possible. No partners withdrew due to the internal arrangements, as the example partnership had clearly communicated from the outset that there would not be full (e.g., 100%) reimbursement of personnel costs.

Data Transfer

Q: Who is responsible for sending the data to the European Commission? Is it each partner?

A: The data needs to be provided to the European Commission at the partnership level, i.e. one entity needs to provide all data to the Commission. How the data is collected internally in the partnership is up to the consortium.

Q: Does the partnership only need to transfer data from the FSTP proposals that have been selected for funding?

A: No, data from proposals that were not selected for funding also need to be submitted. Data on all proposals are essential to meet the requirements of Horizon Europe's general monitoring framework, otherwise important information may be missing (success rates, impact, etc.).

Q: Do you need one XML per funded project, or per call including all projects?

A: One file per project is required. This facilitates later updates.

Q: When and how often do XML-files have to be uploaded?

A: Uploads should take place as close to real time as possible. The transfer facility is always available and partnerships can upload the forms as soon as they have the data. An IT tool checks updates. When files are validated (pass security checks in order to accept the submission) the uploading entity can see them live.

In some Grant Agreements, these data transfers may be tied to specific deliverables or a milestone to submit the data (this is in fact recommended for new co-funded partnerships launching now). Most of the time this should happen two times per call (list of proposal received and list of signed projects).

Q: When will the results XML-template be published? This may impact monitoring schemes during calls.

A: The results template is scheduled to be published in Q1/2026.

Q: Is there any public FAQ channel?

A: Commission services are available for feedback and support and are working on additional support materials.

The Q&A from the data transfer webinar in June 2025 is available on the [ERA-LEARN Website](#)

Q: Is it mandatory to provide the data?

A: Yes, this is a mandatory legal obligation for all co-funded partnerships stemming from Art. 50 of the Horizon Europe regulation. It applies for both existing partnerships and those under preparation, regardless of whether this obligation is explicitly detailed in the Grant Agreement.

Phasing out strategies towards sustainable ecosystems

Q: Following the Commission guidelines on phasing-out strategies, partnerships need to present at least one scenario without Framework Programme funding. Can partnerships also provide a scenario including a merger with other partnerships?

A: Partnerships need to provide at least one credible scenario without EU Framework Programme funding, that fulfils the compulsory elements (outlined in the guidance for the checklist). They may also provide other scenarios, such as merging with other partnerships or support by other funding programmes. The phasing out strategies can be seen as transition strategies in this sense. One reason why the European Commission is making efforts to bring partnerships together by sector was indeed to reflect on future collaborations.

The documentation of the workshop on phasing-out strategies is available [here](#).

The Commission's guidelines on phasing-out strategies can be downloaded [here](#).

Further information

[Annotated Model Grant Agreement \(AGA\)](#)

[Standard Application Form for co-funded partnerships](#)

[Top-up-Application Form for co-funded partnerships](#)

[Standard Evaluation Form \(HE COFUND\)](#)

[Financial Regulation](#)

[Horizon Europe Regulation](#)

[Horizon Europe Work Programme General Annexes](#)

[Proposal of the European Commission for Horizon Europe 2028-2034](#)

[General guidance for Consortium Agreements](#)

[ERA-LEARN Model Consortium Agreement for co-funded partnerships](#)

[ERA LEARN database](#)

[ERA-LEARN Website: Q&A from the data transfer webinar](#)

[ERA-LEARN Website: Documentation of the workshop on phasing-out strategies](#)

[COM note on phasing-out strategies](#)

