



# TERMS OF REFERENCE (ToR) FOR THE FIRST CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Specifications and Requirements for the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE  
First Call for Proposals



15.11.2021





## Disclaimer

When launching the first call for proposals, the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme document (IP) will not yet be approved by the European Commission. Due to this, applicants shall be aware of the following uncertainties and risks:

- Contents of the programme might change following negotiations with the European Commission. This might lead to changes in the programme thematic scope, thus also affecting the relevance of project proposals submitted within the call.
- The programme monitoring committee, i.e. the body responsible - among others - to approve the terms and conditions for ERDF support from the programme, as well as the criteria for the selection of project proposals published with the call, will be established only after the approval of the programme by the European Commission. The monitoring committee might potentially change such conditions for support and selection criteria, if necessary, even if they were already approved by the Member States participating in the programming committee (the “Working Group CE21+”).

The above considered, by submitting a project proposal, applicants (lead applicants and all partners) shall bear and accept the above risks. Under no circumstances the programme and the participating Member States can therefore be held responsible or liable in any way for any claims, damages, losses, expenses, costs or liabilities whatsoever (including, without limitation, any direct or indirect damages for loss of profits, business interruption or loss of information).

## 1. Preamble

This document outlines the terms and conditions that apply specifically to the first call for proposals launched by the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE (CE) Programme. More general information on rules and requirements to be observed when applying for Interreg CE funding can be found in the programme manual, which is available at the [programme website](#). **The knowledge of both documents is essential for developing and submitting a project proposal.**

This document is part of the “Application Package for the First Call for Proposals”, which is available at [programme website](#). The application package consists of:

- a. Terms of Reference (ToR) for the call (this document);
- b. Off-line template of application form, providing guidance on how to fill-in the application form in Jems;
- c. Lead partner declaration template;
- d. Project partner declaration template;
- e. Simplified financial statement (applicable only to private lead applicants).

Further information and guidance on the application process can be found in video tutorials and other support measures developed by the programme with the aim of supporting applicants in designing and submitting their project proposals (see also § 10 in this respect).



## 2. Objectives and Focus of the Call

It is the mission of the Interreg CE Programme to

*“Bring regions and cities together beyond borders to find fitting solutions for their citizens, in a fair and equal way everywhere”<sup>1</sup>*

To this end, the first call for proposals intends to select high quality transnational projects, in which relevant organisations cooperate to make regions more resilient to common challenges that know no borders and which cannot be solved alone.

Within the first call, project proposals can be submitted under **all four programme priorities** and **nine specific objectives**. The description of programme priorities and objectives, together with exemplary actions, is provided for in chapter 2 of the IP available at the [programme website](#).

## 3. Budget of the Call

The programme will allocate around 72m EUR from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to the first call for proposals. An indicative ERDF allocation to the four programme priorities is presented in the table below. When selecting projects to be funded, such allocation may be adapted by the monitoring committee (MC) according to programme needs.

Programme priority	Indicative ERDF allocation (m EUR)
1. Cooperating for a smarter central Europe	22
2. Cooperating for a greener central Europe	36
3. Cooperating for a better-connected central Europe	7
4. Improving governance for cooperation in central Europe	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>

The ERDF co-financing rate is 80%. Beneficiaries shall ensure the needed co-financing.

The ERDF co-financing may be reduced in case of State aid relevance of project activities, in compliance with relevant rules on the matter (see also chapter 1.4.4.3 of the programme manual).

## 4. Project Features

The first call for proposals aims at selecting projects that have the following characteristics:

- A partnership ranging indicatively from 5 to 12 partners;
- A budget ranging indicatively from 1,2 to 2,4 m EUR ERDF;
- An indicative project duration up to 36 months.

Project proposals with longer or shorter duration, as well as with smaller or bigger partnerships or budgets may also be selected for funding, if justified by the project scope and the planned activities.

<sup>1</sup> Chapter 1.2 of the Interreg Programme CENTRAL EUROPE 2021-2027, available at the [programme website](#).



## 5. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants for the first call for proposals are:

- National, regional and local public bodies;
- Private institutions, including private companies, having legal personality;
- International organisations acting under the national law of an EU Member State;
- International organisations acting under international law, with restrictions.

Any of the eligible applicants, with the exception of international organisations acting under international law, can take the lead partner role as long as it is located in the programme area or it qualifies as “assimilated partner” (for the definition of assimilated partner, please refer to chapter I.3.1.1 of the programme manual).

Private lead applicants must hold minimum financial capacity requirements in order to be eligible as lead partners. Project proposals submitted by private lead applicants not meeting the necessary financial capacity criteria will be rejected.

## 6. Transnationality of Partnerships

As minimum requirement, the partnership must involve:

- At least three financing partners;
- From at least three countries; and
- At least two of the partners located in Interreg CE regions.

A European Group of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)<sup>2</sup> is eligible as sole beneficiary provided that the above-mentioned minimum requirements are complied with. For an EGTC to be eligible as sole beneficiary, it must be established in one of the Interreg CE Member States.

Applicants located outside the programme area but within the EU can also apply for funding as project partners, however such partners shall bring a clear benefit to the programme area. Their involvement is considered as exceptional and must be duly justified.

Applicants can also be located outside the EU, but they will not receive ERDF funding from the Interreg CE Programme.

<sup>2</sup> In the meaning of Article 2(16) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060.



## 7. Selection of Proposals

Project proposals will be selected for funding following an assessment of the received applications based on a standardised procedure, to safeguard the principles of transparency and equal treatment.

Project proposals which successfully pass a **formal/administrative compliance check** and, in case of private lead applicants, a **lead applicant financial capacity check** (see chapter II.4.2 of the programme manual), enter the quality assessment.

Selection criteria are grouped in two categories, strategic (“Relevance” and “Partnership”) and operational (“Implementation”). The quality assessment is performed along these three criteria by applying the following guiding questions:



Criteria		Guiding questions
STRATEGIC	Relevance	<p><u>Intervention logic and transnationality</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How relevant is the project proposal in relation to the targeted programme specific objective and the expected result? Is the importance and added value of transnational cooperation for the topic addressed clearly demonstrated?</li> <li>• Is the project intervention logic (i.e. project specific objectives, outputs and expected results) clearly defined and consistent?</li> </ul>
		<p><u>Policy and territorial relevance, horizontal principles</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How relevant is the project proposal for the challenges and needs of the CE programme area, and in particular for the specific situation of the participating regions?</li> <li>• How clearly does the project proposal contribute to the relevant policy framework at different levels?</li> <li>• How well does the proposal contribute to horizontal principles (i.e. equal opportunities and non-discrimination, gender equality, sustainable development including environment protection) and integrate them in the project design?</li> </ul>
		<p><u>Innovativeness and synergies</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the innovativeness of the project proposal clearly demonstrated? How far does it go beyond existing practices in the sector and/or participating regions? How well does the project proposal build on available knowledge and make use of synergies with other projects or initiatives?</li> </ul>
	Partnership	<p><u>Partnership composition and competences</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How relevant is the partnership composition in order to respond to the identified challenges and needs? Does it demonstrate sufficient competences and capacities to implement the planned activities in the participating regions, considering the necessary governance levels, and achieve the expected results?</li> <li>• Does the lead applicant have sufficient experience and capacity to manage a transnational cooperation project or is there a clear plan to acquire missing competences through e.g. additional staff or sub-contracting? Do all partners have a clear role and matching competences to fulfil their tasks? In case of partners outside the programme area, is the added value of their participation duly justified?</li> </ul> <p><u>Transnational cooperation approach</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How well does the partnership reflect the transnational cooperation approach and is it geographically balanced? Are partners actively involved for a joint implementation of activities?</li> </ul>
OPERATIONAL	Implementation	<p><u>Methodology and work plan</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the methodology suitable to obtain the planned outputs and results? Are the work plan and timing of activities, deliverables and outputs realistic, consistent and transparent? In case of investments, are they clearly relevant for reaching the project objectives? Do they have a clear transnational and pilot character?</li> <li>• Are communication activities planned in the work plan and are they relevant for achieving communication objectives? How well are target groups (and other stakeholders including associated partners) actively involved in project activities?</li> <li>• How well does the project proposal conceptualise the ownership/durability, long lasting effects and transferability of outputs and results?</li> <li>• Does the management approach show good potential to secure a sound project management, coordination and risk mitigation?</li> </ul> <p><u>Budget</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the total budget demonstrate value for money? Is there coherence between project design and budget? Are the financial contributions of the partners balanced and do they reflect partner responsibilities?</li> </ul>



The quality assessment of the first call for proposals is carried out in two phases, with a first phase aimed at excluding from the selection process those proposals lacking of relevance for the programme (relevance filter) and a second phase assessing all details of the proposals (full assessment).



The **relevance filter** focuses on particular aspects of the strategic assessment criteria ‘relevance’ and ‘partnership’:

- Relevance and clarity of the intervention logic, notably its contribution to the targeted programme specific objective, as well as the added value of the proposed transnational cooperation approach;
- Relevance of the partnership composition including its transnationality.

Proposals not showing a sufficient quality when assessed against the above aspects of the two strategic criteria are rejected. The decision for passing project proposals to the full assessment or for their rejection is taken by the programme MC.

The **full assessment** of project proposals is performed against the full set of strategic and operational criteria and guiding questions as outlined in the table above.

For the full assessment, the following scoring scale is used:

Appraisal	Explanation
5 “excellent”	The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. The provided information is clear and coherent. Any shortcomings are minor.
4 “good”	The proposal addresses the criterion well, but a small number of shortcomings is present.
3 “adequate”	The proposal addresses the criterion to a sufficient level, but some aspects have not been met fully or are not explained in full clarity or detail.
2 “insufficient”	The proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are serious shortcomings and/or the provided information is of low quality.
1 “poor”	The criterion is inadequately addressed by the proposal, or the required information is missing.

In order to help applicants designing their project proposals, a complimentary **self-assessment tool** reflecting the assessment criteria and guiding questions is available at the [programme website](#).

Parallel to the quality assessment, a **State aid analysis** of proposals is conducted in order to identify the State aid relevance of project proposals as well as the concerned partners.



Project proposals will be selected by the programme MC at the level of each priority axis, on the basis of the results of the quality assessment.

Applicants will be notified about the outcome of the selection process after the MC decisions on relevance filter and the full assessment of the submitted proposals.

For further information on the whole assessment process, please refer to chapter II.4 of the programme manual.

## 8. Contracting of Approved Projects

Project proposals selected for funding by the programme MC and which, if applicable, successfully fulfilled the conditions for approval set forth by the MC, will conclude a subsidy contract between the MA and the lead partner.

The subsidy contract constitutes the legal framework for the implementation of the project. It confirms the final ERDF commitment to the project, it sets out the conditions for support and it provides implementing arrangements. The most recent version of the approved application form is an integral part of the subsidy contract. The subsidy contract model is available at [the programme website](#).

The LP shall establish legal arrangements for relations with all project partners in a partnership agreement. The partnership agreement includes provisions that, inter alia, guarantee the sound financial management of the funds allocated to the project, including the arrangements for a recovery of amounts unduly paid. The partnership agreement model is available at [the programme website](#).

## 9. Submission of Proposals and Deadline

The Interreg CE first call for proposals is organised in a “one-step” procedure.

Project proposals must be submitted in English language, only through the web-based programme joint electronic monitoring system (Jems) available at <https://jems.interreg-central.eu>. Please note that Jems will be online in 2022, as from at least three weeks before the set deadline for submitting proposals.

Project proposals must be submitted by the lead applicant at the latest by:

**23.02.2022 at 18:00 CET**

The application package contains also an offline template of the application form (for information purposes only), which includes additional guidance for filling out the various sections.

The expected timeline for the MC decision on funding will be published on the [programme website](#) after the submission deadline. The programme website also includes an outlook to the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE second call for proposals.





## 10. Support to Applicants

The programme offers the following support measures and tools to help applicants in submitting quality proposals:

- Applicant community for project idea exchanges and matchmaking
- Video explainers and tutorials
- Webinars on a broad variety of topics
- Individual consultations for lead applicants
- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
- Helpdesks for content, finance and technical support
- National support by national contact points (NCPs)
- Tools for self-assessment and drafting

Please read chapter II.3 of the programme manual for more information and visit the programme website for regular updates and further details regarding all support measures.