

"Multi-region assistance for the assessment of the potential use of financial instruments supported by the ERDF, CF, ESF and EAFRD in accordance with Title IV of Regulation (EU) 1303/2013"

Call for proposals

<2015CE16BGT001>

Deadline for submission of applications:

31 July 2015

APPLICANTS ARE ADVISED TO READ CAREFULLY THE BELOW INSTRUCTIONS AND TO USE THE CHECK LIST PROVIDED IN THE APPLICATION FORM IN ORDER TO ENSURE THAT APPLICATIONS ARE COMPLETE WHEN SUBMITTED.

SHOULD CHANGES OCCUR REGARDING FORMAL REQUIREMENTS FOR SUBMISSION OF APPLICATIONS, THEY WILL BE HIGHLIGHTED ON THE WEBSITE ON WHICH THE CALL HAS BEEN PUBLISHED. APPLICANTS ARE THEREFORE ADVISED TO CHECK THIS WEBSITE REGULARLY PRIOR TO SUBMITTING THEIR APPLICATION.

CALL FOR PROPOSALS – < 2015CE16BGT001>

Multi-region assistance for the assessment of the potential use of financial instruments supported by the ERDF, CF, ESF and EAFRD in accordance with Title IV of Regulation (EU) 1303/2013

1. CONTEXT

The Europe 2020 strategy and the Commission Communication on the MFF 2014-2020 called for a stronger role of financial instruments in 2014-2020. The European Council 24/25 October 2013 conclusions subsequently gave a clear mandate that the programming negotiations of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) should be used to "significantly increase the overall EU support from these funds to leverage-based financial instruments for SMEs in 2014-2020, while at least doubling support in countries where conditions remain tight." More recently, the "Investment Plan for Europe"¹ invited Member States to increase significantly their use of innovative financial instruments in key investment areas in order to achieve at least an overall doubling in their use. The new European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF)² legal framework facilitates and encourages the use of financial instruments. It broadens the scope of financial instruments (open to all thematic objectives) and it offers a variety of different implementation options. Relevant legal provisions are to be found notably in Title IV of Regulation (EU) 1303/2013.

To achieve the reinforced use of financial instruments in 2014-2020 adequate assistance and advisory services for the benefit of managing authorities/intermediate bodies and other stakeholders are a prerequisite.

To develop the necessary knowledge base and to improve the administrative capacity of the bodies involved in the implementation of financial instruments, the Commission (notably DG REGIO, DG AGRI, DG EMPL and DG MARE) are making available technical assistance and advisory services to the benefit of Member States, its managing authorities/intermediate bodies and other stakeholders. These assistance and advisory services will be delivered in a coherent way via a common facility, called *fi-compass*, which consists of two strands:

¹ COM(2014)903 final of 26.11.2014.

² Including the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF), the Cohesion Fund (CF), the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF).

- the horizontal strand, provided by the European Commission in partnership with the EIB, which delivers advisory services and guidance applicable in all Member States to all types of financial instruments to ensure common standards and consistency (e.g. exchange of good practice, networking, training, methodological guidance on common themes such as ex-ante assessments, public procurement, state aid, etc.);
- the multi-region assistance will provide EU funding to projects which aim at assessing possible use of FIs, involve expertise from international or national financial institutions, and are proposed by at least two managing authorities/intermediate bodies, normally from at least two EU Member States. Such projects will target possible use of FIs in priority investment areas that are specific and/or shared by the applying regions (e.g. the financing of energy efficiency interventions in large housing estates in Central and Eastern Europe or support for inclusion of Roma).

This call for proposals aims at the selection of actions to be co-financed under *fi-compass* multi-region assistance which would assess the potential use of financial instruments under the programmes co-funded by the ERDF, CF, ESF and EAFRD in accordance with Title IV of Regulation (EU) 1303/2013.

It is published under article 58 of Regulation (EU) 1303/2013 and the following annual work programmes:

- REGIO's work programme C(2015)619 published on http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/index.cfm/en/newsroom/funding-opportunities/financing-decisions/
- EMPL's work programme C(2015)2140 published on <http://ec.europa.eu/social/keyDocuments.jsp?advSearchKey=financing&mode=advancedSubmit&langId=en&policyArea=&type=0&country=0&year=0>
- AGRI's work programme C(2014)9370 published on http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/cap-funding/budget/financing-decisions/index_en.htm

2. OBJECTIVES AND THEMES OF THE CALL

The support provided to actions co-financed under this call is expected to contribute to an increased use of financial instruments to ultimately achieve the objectives of ERDF, CF, ESF and EAFRD-related policies³, in particular by extending their use to new/innovative areas.

More specifically, the objective is to improve the knowledge of managing authorities/intermediate bodies of programmes co-funded under ERDF, CF, ESF and EAFRD by building up relevant expertise for the possible use of specific financial instruments, their set-up and implementation, with regard to issues common to at least two regions in at least two distinct Member States to ensure a wider and smoother uptake of these instruments.

³ As specified in Regulation (EU) 1303/2013, Regulation (EU) 1299/1301, Regulation (EU) 1300/2013, Regulation (EU) 1301/2013, Regulation (EU) 1304/2013 and Regulation 1305/2013.

The supported actions will therefore aim at the assessment of the potential use of financial instruments addressing specific challenges shared by applying managing authorities/intermediate bodies and programmes under their remit.

To ensure the relevance of advice provided to managing authorities/intermediate bodies, at least one International Financial Institution (IFI), such as the EIB, EBRD, World Bank, CEB, or one or more financial institutions covering with their activities all the regions included in the geographical scope of programmes under the responsibility of the applying managing authorities/intermediate bodies, must be involved in the completion of the action⁴.

As a result the participating managing authorities/intermediate bodies will have gained expertise and relevant competences towards taking an informed decision about whether to proceed with the next steps to set up and implement a given financial instrument (e.g. ex-ante assessment, selection of financial intermediaries etc.).

The expertise can be generated through and take the form of e.g. models, surveys, workshops and feasibility studies (outputs). The results of supported actions will be disseminated via the horizontal strand of *fi-compass* and possibly used in other cases.

Actions can be supported under one of the following themes or any combination of them:

- A. Assessing the potential use of financial instruments as a form of support addressing thematic objectives under the programmes co-funded by European Regional Development Fund and/or the Cohesion Fund and specific to and shared by at least two regions from at least two distinct Member States;
- B. Assessing the potential use of financial instruments as a form of support addressing thematic objectives under the programmes co-funded by the European Social Fund and specific to and shared by at least two regions from at least two distinct Member States;
- C. Assessing the potential use of financial instruments as a form of support addressing thematic objectives under the programmes co-funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development specific to and shared by at least two regions from at least two distinct Member States.

3. BUDGET AVAILABLE, MAXIMUM GRANT AMOUNT, MAXIMUM CO-FINANCING RATE, ELIGIBLE COSTS

The total budget earmarked for the co-financing of grant actions is estimated at EUR 10.83 million.

The maximum grant amount per action and per theme as indicated under point 2 will be:

- A. EUR 2.5 million,
- B. EUR 0.5 million,
- C. EUR 1.4 million.

The maximum grant amount per action combining A, B and/or C will be EUR 2.5 million.

The grant will take the form of reimbursement of up to 95% of the actual eligible costs and is limited to the maximum grant amount as specified above. To be eligible, costs

⁴ The managing authorities/intermediate bodies retain full responsibility in the selection of the respective parties thus adhering to the applicable legislation including but not limited to procurement rules.

must comply with the criteria defined in articles I.10, I.11 and II.19 of the model grant agreement annexed to the present call. Indirect costs are eligible for flat-rate financing of 7% of the direct eligible costs. Contributions in kind are not regarded as eligible costs.

Grants are calculated on the basis of a detailed estimated budget indicating clearly the costs that are eligible for EU funding. The grant amount may neither exceed the eligible costs nor the amount requested. Amounts are indicated in euros.

The Commission reserves the right not to distribute all the funds available.

The Commission reserves the right to award a grant of less than the amount requested by the applicants. In such a case, applicants will be asked either to increase their co-financing, propose other co-financing means or to decrease the total costs without altering the substance of the proposal. Grants will not be awarded for more than the amount requested.

4. TIMETABLE

The below indicative schedule for the different stages of the selection procedure takes into account the new maximum periods provided for in article 128 of Regulation (EU, Euratom) 966/2012 (the Financial Regulation). However, these periods may be exceeded in exceptional cases, in particular for complex actions, large number of proposals or delays attributable to the applicants.

	Stages	Date and time or indicative period
a)	Publication of the call	28/04/2015
b)	Deadline for submitting applications	31/07/2015
c)	Evaluation period	4 months
d)	Information to applicants	30/11/2015 (indicative)
e)	Signature of grant agreement	31/01/2016 (indicative)
f)	Starting date of the action	As of the first day following the date when the last party signs the grant agreement

5. ADMISSIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

This call for proposal is based on the submission and evaluation of the proposals in one stage.

Application forms and the model budget (per applicant) accompanying the call for proposals are available at http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/index.cfm/en/newsroom/funding-opportunities/.

Applications shall be submitted in writing on the enclosed application form, including its annexes, duly completed, dated, showing a balanced budget (revenue/expenditure), submitted in one paper original signed by the person authorised to enter into legally binding commitments on behalf of the applicant organisation plus electronic copy of original files in initial formats saved on an electronic carrier, such as a pen drive or a CD-rom.

Applications must be drafted in one of the EU official languages. If the application is not submitted in English, it should be accompanied by a summary in English.

Applications must be sent no later than **31/07/2015**.

Applications must be submitted:

a) Either by post or by courier in which case the evidence of the date of dispatch shall be constituted by the postmark or the date of the deposit slip, to the following address:

*European Commission
Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy
Unit B3: Financial Instruments and International Financial Institutions
Relations
Avenue de Beaulieu 5, office 3/28
B – 1049 Brussels/ Belgium*

b) or delivered by hand at the following address:

*European Commission
Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy,
Unit B3: Financial Instruments and International Financial Institutions
Relations
For the attention of Mr S. Appel
Avenue du Bourget, 1
B-1140 Brussels (Evere)*

not later than the end of working hours. In this case, a receipt must be obtained as proof of submission, signed and dated by the official in the Commission's central mail department who took delivery. The department is open from 08.30 to 17.00 Monday to Thursday, and from 8.30 to 16.00 on Fridays. It is closed on Saturdays, Sundays and Commission holidays.

Applications sent by fax or e-mail will not be accepted.

The paper version of the full proposal must be placed inside two sealed envelopes, one inside the other. The inner envelope must contain the paper version of the full proposal and bear the indication:

*"MRA Call for proposals 2015, DG REGIO.B3
- Not to be opened by the Postal Service of the Central Mail Department"*

Failure to comply with those requirements will lead to the rejection of the application.

No modification to the application is allowed once the deadline for submission has elapsed. However, if there is a need to clarify certain aspects or for the correction of clerical mistakes, the Commission shall contact the applicant for this purpose during the evaluation process.

Applicants will be informed in writing about the results of the selection process.

Should changes occur regarding formal requirements for submission of applications, they will be highlighted on the website on which the call has been published. Applicants are therefore advised to check this website regularly prior to submitting their application.

6. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

APPLICATIONS MUST COMPLY WITH ALL OF THE ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA SET OUT IN THIS SECTION.

6.1. Eligible applicants

An application must be submitted by a consortium of at least two:

- managing authorities, as defined in article 123(1) of Regulation (EU) 1303/2013 or intermediate bodies as defined in article 123(6)⁵ or article 123(7) of Regulation (EU) 1303/2013 designated for programmes co-funded under the ERDF, CF, ESF, or
- managing authorities as defined under article 66(1) of Regulation (EU) 1305/2013 or intermediate bodies as defined under article 66(2) of Regulation (EU) 1305/2013 designated for programmes co-funded under the EAFRD,

from at least two distinct Member States.

An application by a consortium of at least two managing authorities/intermediate bodies, which includes at least one managing authority/intermediate body of a cross-border or a transnational cooperation programme designated in accordance with Article 21 of Regulation (EU) 1299/2013 is also eligible and in such a case the requirement for the managing authorities/intermediate bodies to be from at least two distinct Member States does not apply.

In case of intermediate bodies as defined in article 123(6) of Regulation (EU) 1303/2013, eligible applicants are only those intermediate bodies which are designated by the Member States to carry out certain tasks of the managing authority, including at least the selection of operation as provided for in Article 125(3) of Regulation (EU) 1303/2013, i.e. intermediate bodies solely carrying out certain tasks of the certifying authority are excluded.

Legal entities having a legal or capital link with applicant(s) that is neither limited to the action nor established for the sole purpose of its implementation, may take part in the action as affiliated entities, and may declare eligible costs as specified in section 11.2. For that purpose, applicants shall identify such affiliated entities in the application form.

The applicants shall declare on its honour that they are fully eligible in accordance with criteria set out in this call for proposals.

The applicants for the grant action shall designate a coordinator among them and develop their coordination approach and communication plan in their proposal.

The application shall state the legal status of the applicants.

In order to assess the applicants' eligibility, the following supporting documents are requested:

- **Managing authority:** copy of decision designating the public authority or body or private body as managing authority as defined in article 123(1) of Regulation (EU) 1303/2013 and/or Article 66 of Regulation (EU) 1305/2013, whichever relevant;

⁵ Only in the case the Member State designates an intermediate body to carry out certain tasks of the managing authority (i.e. intermediate bodies carrying out certain tasks of the certifying authority are excluded). The minimum tasks should include, at least, the selection of operation as provided for in Article 125(3) of Regulation (EU) 1303/2013.

- **Intermediate bodies:** copy of decision designating the public body or private body as intermediate body as defined in article 123(6) or article 123(7) of Regulation (EU) 1303/2013;
- **Public entity:** copy of the resolution or decision establishing the public company, or other official document establishing the public-law entity;
- **Private entity:** extract from the official journal, copy of articles of association, extract of trade or association register, certificate of liability to VAT (if, as in certain countries, the trade register number and VAT number are identical, only one of these documents is required);
- **Entities without legal personality:** documents providing evidence that their representative(s) have the capacity to undertake legal obligations on their behalf.

6.2. Eligible action

The action must be in conformity with the objectives of the call and correspond to the themes of the call as specified in section 2.

The action must serve a specific common objective, be relevant, and to the benefit of at least two regions from at least two different EU Member States and include an appropriate proportion of cross-border and/or transnational activities, i.e. involving significant interaction among the applicants and aiming at common results.

The action must draw on individualised expertise from and assistance by at least one International Financial Institution (IFI), such as the EIB, EBRD, World Bank, CEB, or one or more financial institutions covering with their, cumulated if applicable, activities all the regions included in the geographical scope of programmes under the responsibility of the applying managing authorities/intermediate bodies. The activities under the action must take place in EU Member States.

Activities eligible under this call for proposals have to be to the benefit of the applicants and the grant action and may include:

- advisory services;
- research activities, surveys, studies, analyses, mapping projects;
- workshops, learning activities;
- actions aiming at cooperation, at the creation and improving of networking, exchanges of good practices;
- awareness and dissemination actions, including conferences, seminars.

The scope of sub-contracting, i.e. the externalisation of specific tasks or activities which form part of the action as described in the proposal and subject to conditions specified in the model grant agreement, shall be specified in the application.

The applications may not envisage provision of financial support to third parties in the sense of Article 137 FR and Article 210 RAP.

6.3. Implementation period

Activities may not start before the first day following the date when the last party signs the grant agreement and are expected to be completed within one year from the date when the last party signs the grant agreement.

7. EXCLUSION CRITERIA

Applicants will be excluded from participating in the call for proposals procedure if they are in any of following situations referred to in Article 106(1) of the Financial Regulation.

Applicants will not be granted financial assistance if, in the course of the grant award procedure, they are in any of the situation referred to in Article 107 of the Financial Regulation.

The same exclusion criteria apply to affiliated entities.

Administrative and financial penalties may be imposed on applicants, or affiliated entities where applicable, who are guilty of misrepresentation.

Applicants must sign a declaration on their honour certifying that they are not in one of the situations referred to in articles 106(1) and 107 to 109 of the Financial Regulation, filling in the relevant form attached to the application form accompanying the call for proposals and available at http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/index.cfm/en/newsroom/funding-opportunities/.

8. SELECTION CRITERIA

The application shall demonstrate the financial and operational capacity of the applicant to carry out the proposed action.

8.1. Financial capacity

Applicants must have stable and sufficient sources of funding to maintain their activity throughout the period during which the action is being carried out and to participate in its funding.

The verification of financial capacity shall not apply to public bodies or international organisations.

The applicants' financial capacity will be verified on the basis of the following indications and supporting documents to be submitted with the application:

- a) Low value grants (\leq EUR 60 000):
 - a declaration on their honour.
- b) Grants \geq EUR 60 000:
 - a declaration on their honour and,
 - the table provided for in the application form, filled in with the relevant statutory accounting figures.
- c) Grants for \geq EUR 750 000, in addition:
 - an audit report produced by an approved external auditor certifying the accounts for the last financial year available.

The above thresholds apply by applicant.

On the basis of the documents submitted, if the Commission considers that financial capacity is not satisfactory, he may:

- Request further information;
- Propose a grant agreement without pre-financing;

- Propose a grant agreement with a pre-financing paid in instalments;
- Propose a grant agreement with a pre-financing covered by a bank guarantee (see section 11.4 below);
- Where applicable, require the joint and several financial liability of all the co-beneficiaries;
- Reject the application.

8.2. Operational capacity

Applicants must have operational (technical and management) capacity and in particular professional competencies as well as appropriate qualifications necessary to complete the proposed action. In this respect, each applicant shall provide a description of its relevant competences and previous experience and those of the key staff who will be involved in the project (according to their CVs) and have to submit a declaration on their honour.

On the basis of the documents submitted, if the Commission considers that operational capacity is not satisfactory, he may:

- Request further information;
- Reject the application.

9. AWARD CRITERIA

Eligible applications/grant actions will be assessed on the basis of the following criteria and taking into account the weighting for each of them as indicated in the square brackets below:

- **Relevance:** the contribution of the grant action and its expected results to the objectives of the call; level of the involvement of a broader scope of expertise sources such as academia; the integral and the comprehensive nature of activities proposed to be carried out under the action; and the innovative nature of the grant action [40%];
- **Impact:** the resulting geographical coverage; the sustainability of the action's results; the transferability and planned use of the expected results, including planned dissemination [30%];
- **Quality:** the effectiveness and rationality of the proposed methodology and organisation (including the timetable and monitoring); the relevance and quality of the means of implementation and of the resources deployed in relation to the objectives envisaged (particularly in terms of cost-effectiveness); consistency of the action proposal [30%].

Applications must score above 50% for each of the three criteria and above 60% in total. Applications falling below those thresholds shall be rejected and not ranked.

10. LEGAL COMMITMENTS

In the event of a grant awarded by the Commission, a grant agreement drawn up in euro and detailing the conditions and level of funding, will be sent to the coordinator as well as the procedure in view to formalise the obligations of the parties.

The model grant agreement is attached to the call for proposals. By signing the application form, applicants declare that, in case they are awarded a grant, they accept the conditions defined in the model grant agreement.

If awarded a grant, at the later stage the applicants will be requested to also submit a legal⁶ and a financial identification forms⁷.

The communication after the deadline for submission of applications will take place in English, the grant agreements will be signed in English and working deliverables will be requested in English.

11. WHERE TO GET MORE INFORMATION

Any additional specific questions related to this call may be addressed to:

European Commission

Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy

Directorate B - Policy

Unit B3 – Financial Instruments and International Financial Institutions Relations

E-mail address: REGIO-MULTI-REGION-CALL@ec.europa.eu

The answers to questions submitted will be published in the Q&A list on website http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/index.cfm/en/newsroom/funding-opportunities/, in order to ensure equal treatment of all potential applicants. Applicants may send their questions concerning this call by email to the above-mentioned e-mail address at the latest 21 calendar days before the closing date for submission of the proposals, clearly indicating the reference of the call for proposal and the subject of their questions. After the deadline for submission, the above-mentioned e-mail address can only be used by the European Commission for requests of additional information and clarification. The European Commission shall reply to all valid questions at the latest 10 calendar days before the closing date for submission of the proposals.

No individual reply to requests concerning the progress of the procedure may be provided by the means of this electronic address. In order to guarantee equal treatment, the European Commission may not give preliminary opinions on the eligibility of an applicant or the quality of the envisaged action.

An information session for eligible beneficiaries will be organised in the course of May 2015.

In addition, during the evaluation procedure, important information for the applicants may, if need be, published on the website http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/index.cfm/en/newsroom/funding-opportunities/ with the other documents referring to the present call. Applicants are thus strongly encouraged to consult this website regularly.

12. ANNEX SUBMISSION SET:

The submission set can be downloaded from the following page: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/index.cfm/en/newsroom/funding-opportunities/.

⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/budget/contracts_grants/info_contracts/legal_entities/legal_entities_en.cfm.

⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/budget/contracts_grants/info_contracts/financial_id/financial_id_en.cfm.

It contains:

- Application form with a checklist of documents to be submitted, including:
 - Declaration of honour
 - Estimated budget
- Model grant agreement
- Questions and Answers Guide for Applicants