



CALL FOR PROPOSALS CONCERNING PROJECTS OF COMMON INTEREST UNDER THE CONNECTING EUROPE FACILITY IN THE FIELD OF TRANS-EUROPEAN TELECOMMUNICATION NETWORKS

CEF TELECOM CALLS 2020

CEF-TC-2020-1: European Platform for Digital Skills and Jobs

1. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

The general context for this call for proposals is defined in section 3.19 of the 2019-2020 Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) Telecom Work Programme¹ as published on the call page on the Innovation and Networks Executive Agency (INEA) website.² The background and rationale for this call for proposals are defined in section 3.19.1 of the 2019-2020 Work Programme.

2. PRIORITIES & OBJECTIVES

2.1 Priority outcomes

The priority outcomes of this call for proposals are defined in section 3.19.2.3 of the 2019-2020 Work Programme.

The objective of this call is to support the design and delivery of Master programmes specialised in digital domains to be disseminated via the Digital Skills and Jobs Core Service Platform. These programmes will target advanced digital skills development to address the lack of highly specialised digital skills in Artificial Intelligence (AI). In the Coordinated Plan on Artificial Intelligence³, Member States and the Commission have acknowledged the need of increasing the number of specialised Master programmes in AI to train more people who can enable the deployment of AI throughout the economy.

¹ Commission Implementing Decision C(2020)1078 of 28 February 2020 amending a Multi-Annual Work Programme 2019 and 2020 for financial assistance in the field of Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) Telecommunications sector

² <https://ec.europa.eu/inea/en/connecting-europe-facility/cef-telecom/apply-funding/2020-digital-skills-jobs>

³ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/coordinated-plan-artificial-intelligence>

Proposals must address **only one** of the following objectives:

Objective 1: Design and deliver a Master⁴ programme of 60, 90 or 120 ECTS⁵ credits in Artificial Intelligence;

Objective 2: Design and deliver a Master programme of 60, 90 or 120 ECTS credits focusing on the use of Artificial Intelligence in a specific sector (for example, but not limited to AI for health, agriculture, manufacturing).

All programmes proposed **must**:

- Include a course in Artificial Intelligence ethics of 12 ECTS credits, having as a reference the AI ethical guidelines of the European Commission⁶;
- Develop an online version of modules/a course(s) forming part of the Master programme and disseminate it on the Digital Skills and Jobs Core Service Platform.
- Lead to the awarding of a degree from one of the participating universities.

All proposals **must address** all of the following aspects:

- **Design** the framework of the Master programme and its learning outcomes, and detail how excellence of the academic content will be ensured through the cooperation of the partners.
- Explain how the **learning content** of the Master programme reflects the latest development of technology in the market and how hands-on training, challenge-based learning, in cooperation with the industry and excellence/research partners, will be ensured.
- Explain the **added value** of the designed Master programme compared to the existing education offer delivered in the latest academic year prior to the delivery of the Master programme.
- **The Master programme must be delivered for one set of student intake.**
- Explain the **methodology** for the delivery of the Master programme and how it will address the labour market needs related to advanced digital skills.
- Envisage and explain the mechanisms to **share expertise and resources** among all partners, including industry if participating in the proposal (e.g. granting access to students enrolled in the Master programmes mentioned above to testing facilities, labs or other equipment, etc.).
- Develop an **online version** of modules/a course(s) forming part of the Master programme and make them accessible for free in all EU languages⁷ in the Digital Skills and Jobs Core Service Platform.
- For the purpose of this call, and in order to make the online content of modules/ a course(s) available in all EU official languages, the use of the Automated Translation Building Block is encouraged⁸.

⁴ Corresponds to level 7 in the European Qualification Framework: <https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/content/descriptors-page>

⁵ ECTS: European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System: https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

⁶ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/ethics-guidelines-trustworthy-ai>

⁷ https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/eu-languages_en

⁸ <https://ec.europa.eu/cefdigital/wiki/display/CEFDIGITAL/Integrate+eTranslation+with+your+online+services>

- Make available the online modules/a course(s) free of charge on the Digital Skills and Jobs Core Service Platform throughout the year during which the programme is delivered and for an additional 24 months after the end of the action.
- Carry out the **communication** activities to attract students to enrol in the Master programmes mentioned above.
- Allow for the **mobility** of teaching staff among the universities participating in the proposal.
- Explain how the Master programme courses will continue to be delivered and how the online courses will be kept updated with the latest development in technology after the end of the proposed action.

Applicants should consider delivering the programme in the academic year 2021-2022. If the applicants want to deliver it in the academic year 2022-2023, this should be duly justified in the proposal by explaining the benefit of delaying the delivery and describing the activities that will be carried out in the meantime.

2.2 RESULTS EXPECTED FROM THE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

The benefits and expected outcomes of this call for proposals are defined in section 3.19.2.3 of the 2019-2020 Work Programme.

Proposals selected for funding will be required to demonstrate by the end of the Action:

- The Master programmes are offered and taught to students in all universities participating in the action;
- The contribution of all partners to the design and delivery of the Master programmes (for example, through number of seminars held by SMEs representatives, number of hours taught, etc.);
- The availability of modules forming part of the Master programme or courses related to the Master programme in all EU languages, as well as of the AI ethics course on the Digital Skills and Jobs Core Service Platform.

3. TIMETABLE

Date of publication of call for proposals	Wednesday 12 February 2020
Deadline for the submission of proposals	Tuesday 12 May 2020 (17:00.00 Brussels time)
Evaluation of proposals	June – July 2020 (indicative)
Consultation of the CEF Committee	September 2020 (indicative)
Adoption of the Selection Decision	October 2020 (indicative)
Preparation and signature of grant agreements	Between November 2020 and February 2021 (indicative)

4. BUDGET AVAILABLE

The total budget earmarked for the co-financing of projects under this call for proposals is estimated at €6.5 million.

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 applicant.

5. ADMISSIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

In order to be admissible, proposals must be:

- Submitted electronically in the TENtec Information System eSubmission module.⁹ In this respect, proposals or part(s) of proposals submitted by email or in hard copy will not be admissible.
- Submitted by the deadline for submission of proposals (see sections 3. "Timetable" and 14.2. "Submission process").
- Complete, i.e. all parts of the application form (A, B, C and D) are complete and uploaded in the TENtec eSubmission module.
- Duly signed by the applicant(s).

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

6. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

6.1 Eligible applicants

In accordance with the 2019–2020 Work Programme and pursuant to Article 9 of the CEF Regulation,¹⁰ only those proposals submitted by the following types of applicants are eligible:

- One or more Member State(s);
- With the agreement of the Member State(s) or EEA countr(y)ies concerned, international organisations, Joint Undertakings,¹¹ or public or private undertakings or bodies established in Member States.

⁹ The TENtec eSubmission module is part of the TENtec Information System used to manage CEF actions during their entire lifecycle and enables the electronic submission of proposals under the CEF calls. The link to TENtec is available under the "Application Forms" section of the call webpage: <https://ec.europa.eu/inea/en/connecting-europe-facility/cef-telecom/apply-funding/2020-digital-skills-jobs>

¹⁰ Regulation (EU) No 1316/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 establishing the Connecting Europe Facility, amending Regulation (EU) No 913/2010 and repealing Regulations (EC) No 680/2007 and (EC) No 67/2010 Text with EEA relevance, see <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32013R1316>

¹¹ For the purposes of this call, a Joint Undertaking means a joint undertaking established by the EU for the efficient execution of EU research, technological development and demonstration programmes, as referred to in Article 187 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, see <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A12012E%2FTXT>

Consortium requirements

For Objective 1:

In order to be eligible, proposals submitted under Objective 1 must be submitted by a consortium composed of:

- **At least three Master degree-awarding Universities¹² from three different Member States and/or EEA countries participating in the CEF Telecom programme. One of the participating Universities must be the coordinator of the consortium;**
- **At least two Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs). Each SME must provide with the proposal a status assessment report generated via the wizard available on the European Commission DG Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs web page, which confirms a company qualifies as a SME.¹³**
- **At least one excellence/research centre with focus on Artificial Intelligence. Each excellence/research centre must provide a self-declaration signed by its authorised representative confirming its status as an excellence/research centre. The template of the self-declaration is available on the call web page and must not be modified.**

Participation of industry is encouraged.

For Objective 2:

In order to be eligible, proposals submitted under objective 2 must be submitted by a consortium composed of:

- **At least three Master degree-awarding Universities¹⁴ from three different Member States and/or EEA countries participating in the CEF Telecom programme. One of the participating Universities must be the coordinator of the consortium;**
- **At least one excellence/research centre with focus on Artificial Intelligence. Each excellent/research centre must provide a self-declaration signed by its authorised representative confirming its status as an excellence/research centre. The template of the self-declaration is available on the call web page and must not be modified.**

Participation of institutions/organisations entities with relevant sector-specific expertise (for example, but not limited to institutions/organisations in health, agriculture, manufacturing) is encouraged.

EEA countries

In accordance with section 5.3.1 of the 2019–2020 Work Programme, European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries which are members of the European Economic Area (EEA)

¹² https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/accredited_heis_within_the_erasmus_programme_09_01_2020.xlsx

¹³ https://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/SME-Wizard/smeq.do;SME_SESSION_ID=F3XTffcYVVwdkRQI-A4DWflpSaw-HhsYalDxhtHylEfn4sBKBGdp!1433221709?execution=e1s1

¹⁴ https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/accredited_heis_within_the_erasmus_programme_09_01_2020.xlsx

may participate¹⁵ in the call for proposals, even when not explicitly mentioned in the Work Programme text, with the same rights, obligations and requirements as EU Member States. At the time of call publication, these conditions apply to Norway and Iceland only¹⁶.



For UK applicants: Please be aware that following the entry into force of the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement¹⁷ on 1 February 2020 and in particular Articles 127(6), 137 and 138, the references to natural or legal persons residing or established in a Member State of the European Union are to be understood as including natural or legal persons residing or established in the United Kingdom. UK applicants are therefore eligible to participate under this call.

Third countries and third country entities

Where necessary to achieve the objectives of a given project of common interest and where duly motivated, third countries and entities established in third countries may participate in actions contributing to the projects of common interest. They may not receive funding under the CEF Regulation, except where it is indispensable to achieve the objectives of a given project of common interest.

Acceding states and candidate countries benefiting from a pre-accession strategy may also participate in the sector of the CEF covering telecommunications infrastructure in accordance with agreements signed with the EU. As at the time of call publication no such agreements have been signed, the same conditions as for third countries apply to acceding states and candidate countries.

Third countries and entities established in third countries may only participate as part of a consortium with applicants from EU/EEA countries. The application must contain the agreement of the Member State concerned by the proposed Action and a declaration from the European partner involved in the proposal on why the participation of the third country applicant is indispensable. Applicants that are entities established in a third country must also provide proof of the support of the third country authorities concerned by the action.

Applicants without legal personality

Proposals may be submitted by entities which do not have legal personality under the applicable national law, provided that their representatives have the capacity to undertake legal obligations on their behalf and offer a guarantee for the protection of the EU's financial interests equivalent to that offered by legal persons.

Natural persons

Proposals submitted by natural persons are not eligible.

¹⁵ According to article 7.2 of Regulation (EU) No 283/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2014 on guidelines for trans-European networks in the area of telecommunications infrastructures and repealing Decision No 1336/97/EC.

¹⁶ For the purposes of this call, Liechtenstein is considered a third country

¹⁷ Agreement on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community

Affiliated entities

Applicants may designate affiliated entities within the meaning of Article 187 of the Financial Regulation¹⁸, for the purpose of supporting the implementation of the action submitted for funding. Such affiliated entities must comply with the eligibility criteria for applicants.

Member State agreement

Any applicant that cannot provide the agreement of the EU Member State or EEA country concerned will not be eligible.

6.2 Eligible actions

In line with Article 7 of the CEF Regulation, only actions contributing to "projects of common interest" as identified in the Telecom Guidelines¹⁹ shall be eligible for support through EU financial aid in the form of grants.

Please note that failure to comply with any of the eligibility criteria indicated above will lead to the rejection of the application.

Implementation period

The Action may not start before the date of submission of the application.²⁰

Indicative duration

The indicative duration of an Action proposed under this call is 24 to 36 months.

7 EXCLUSION CRITERIA

7.1 Exclusion

An applicant shall be excluded from participating in call for proposals procedures where:

- (a) the applicant is bankrupt, subject to insolvency or winding-up procedures, where its assets are being administered by a liquidator or by a court, where it is in an arrangement with creditors, where its business activities are suspended, or where it is in any analogous situation arising from a similar procedure provided for under national laws or regulations;
- (b) it has been established by a final judgment or a final administrative decision that the applicant is in breach of its obligations relating to the payment of taxes or social security contributions in accordance with the applicable law;

¹⁸ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32018R1046>

¹⁹ Regulation (EU) No 283/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2014 on guidelines for trans-European networks in the area of telecommunications infrastructure and repealing Decision No 1336/97/EC (Text with EEA relevance) See specifically Article 4 and the Annex for more information. See <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32014R0283>

²⁰ The date when the proposal was last submitted in the TENtec eSubmission module will be considered as the submission date of the proposal.

- (c) it has been established by a final judgment or a final administrative decision that the applicant is guilty of grave professional misconduct by having violated applicable laws or regulations or ethical standards of the profession to which the applicant belongs, or by having engaged in any wrongful intent or gross negligence, including, in particular, any of the following:
 - (i) fraudulently or negligently misrepresenting information required for the verification of the absence of grounds for exclusion or the fulfilment of eligibility or selection criteria or in the performance of a contract, a grant agreement or a grant decision;
 - (ii) entering into agreement with other applicants with the aim of distorting competition;
 - (iii) violating intellectual property rights;
 - (iv) attempting to influence the decision-making process of the Commission/Agency during the award procedure;
 - (v) attempting to obtain confidential information that may confer upon it undue advantages in the award procedure;
- (d) it has been established by a final judgment that the applicant is guilty of any of the following:
 - (i) fraud, within the meaning of Article 3 of Directive (EU) 2017/1371 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Article 1 of the Convention on the protection of the European Communities' financial interests, drawn up by the Council Act of 26 July 1995;
 - (ii) corruption, as defined in Article 4(2) of Directive (EU) 2017/1371 or Article 3 of the Convention on the fight against corruption involving officials of the European Communities or officials of Member States of the European Union, drawn up by the Council Act of 26 May 1997, or conduct referred to in Article 2(1) of Council Framework Decision 2003/568/JHA, or corruption as defined in the applicable law;
 - (iii) conduct related to a criminal organisation, as referred to in Article 2 of Council Framework Decision 2008/841/JHA;
 - (iv) money laundering or terrorist financing, within the meaning of Article 1(3), (4) and (5) of Directive (EU) 2015/849 of the European Parliament and of the Council;
 - (v) terrorist offences or offences linked to terrorist activities, as defined in Articles 1 and 3 of Council Framework Decision 2002/475/JHA, respectively, or inciting, aiding, abetting or attempting to commit such offences, as referred to in Article 4 of that Decision;
 - (vi) child labour or other offences concerning trafficking in human beings as referred to in Article 2 of Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council;
- (e) the applicant has shown significant deficiencies in complying with main obligations in the performance of a contract, a grant agreement or a grant decision financed by the Union's budget, which has led to its early termination or to the application of liquidated damages or other contractual penalties, or which has been discovered following checks, audits or investigations by an authorising officer, OLAF or the Court of Auditors;
- (f) it has been established by a final judgment or final administrative decision that the applicant has committed an irregularity within the meaning of Article 1(2) of Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 2988/95;
- (g) it has been established by a final judgement or final administrative decision that the applicant has created an entity in a different jurisdiction with the intent to circumvent

- fiscal, social or any other legal obligations of mandatory application in the jurisdiction of its registered office, central administration or principal place of business;
- (h) it has been established by a final judgement or final administrative decision that an entity has been created with the intent referred to in point (g);
 - (i) for the situations referred to in points (c) to (h) above, the applicant is subject to:
 - (i) facts established in the context of audits or investigations carried out by European Public Prosecutor's Office after its establishment, the Court of Auditors, the European Anti-Fraud Office or the internal auditor, or any other check, audit or control performed under the responsibility of an authorising officer of an EU institution, of a European office or of an EU agency or body;
 - (ii) non-final judgments or non-final administrative decisions which may include disciplinary measures taken by the competent supervisory body responsible for the verification of the application of standards of professional ethics;
 - (iii) facts referred to in decisions of persons or entities being entrusted with EU budget implementation tasks;
 - (iv) information transmitted by Member States implementing Union funds;
 - (v) decisions of the Commission relating to the infringement of the Union's competition law or of a national competent authority relating to the infringement of Union or national competition law; or
 - (vi) decisions of exclusion by an authorising officer of an EU institution, of a European office or of an EU agency or body.

7.2 Remedial measures

If an applicant/affiliated entity declares one of the situations of exclusion listed above (see section 7.1), it must indicate the measures it has taken to remedy the exclusion situation, thus demonstrating its reliability. This may include e.g. technical, organisational and personnel measures to correct the conduct and prevent further occurrence, compensation of damage or payment of fines or of any taxes or social security contributions. The relevant documentary evidence which illustrates the remedial measures taken must be provided in annex to the declaration. This does not apply for situations referred in point (d) of section 7.1.

7.3 Rejection from the call for proposals

The authorising officer shall not award a grant to an applicant who:

- (a) is in an exclusion situation established in accordance with section 7.1; or
- (b) has misrepresented the information required as a condition for participating in the procedure or has failed to supply that information; or
- (c) was previously involved in the preparation of documents used in the award procedure where this entails a breach of the principle of equal treatment, including distortion of competition, that cannot be remedied otherwise.

The same exclusion criteria apply to affiliated entities. Applicants and their affiliated entities, if applicable, must certify that they are not in one of the situations listed above.

Administrative sanctions (exclusion) may be imposed on applicants, or affiliated entities where applicable, if any of the declarations or information provided as a condition for participating in this procedure prove to be false.

7.4 Supporting documents

Applicants and affiliated entities must provide a declaration on their honour certifying that they are not in one of the situations referred to in Articles 136(1) and 141 of the Financial Regulation, by filling in application form Part B1 (for applicants) or B2 (for affiliated entities) accompanying the call for proposals and available at under the "Application Forms" section of the call webpage: <https://ec.europa.eu/inea/en/connecting-europe-facility/cef-telecom/apply-funding/2020-digital-skills-jobs>.

8. SELECTION CRITERIA

The selection criteria are referred to in Annex 2 of the Work Programme. The financial and operational capacity of applicants and designated affiliated entities will be assessed as specified below.

The requirement to demonstrate financial and operational capacity also applies to designated affiliated entities **only where**, according to the proposal, the affiliated entity(ies) will be the only one(s) implementing the proposed Action.

Exceptions: The requirement for applicants to demonstrate their financial and operational capacity **does not** apply to Member States, public sector undertakings or bodies established in the EU/EEA countries (Norway and Iceland), third countries, international organisations, European Economic Interest Groupings (EEIG)²¹ in which at least one member is a public sector body, and Joint Undertakings.

Applicants should register in the [Participant Register](#) and provide a Participant Identification Code (PIC, 9-digit number), serving as the unique identifier of their organisation. More information is available in the guidance on "Rules on Legal Entity Validation, LEAR appointment and Financial Capacity Assessment"²² and in the instructions indicated in the Application Form Part B template.

8.1 Financial capacity

Applicants must have stable and sufficient sources of funding to maintain their activity throughout the duration of the grant and to participate in its funding. The applicants' financial capacity will be assessed on the basis of the supporting documents requested by the Commission services:

- a) Low value grants (\leq EUR 60 000):
 - a declaration on their honour.
- b) Grants $>$ EUR 60 000:
 - a declaration on their honour, and
 - the profit and loss account as well as the balance sheet for the last 2 financial years for which the accounts were closed;
 - for newly created entities: the business plan might replace the above documents;

²¹ Established in line with Council Regulation (EEC) No 2137/85 of 25 July 1985 – the European Economic Interest Grouping, see <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=URISERV%3A126015>

²² http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/grants_manual/lev/h2020-rules-lev-lear-fvc_en.pdf

c) Grants for an action > EUR 750 000:

- (i) the information and supporting documents mentioned in point b) above, and
- (ii) **an audit report** produced by an approved external auditor certifying the accounts for the last 2 financial years available, where such an audit report is available or whenever a statutory report is required by law.

If the audit report is not available AND a statutory report is not required by law, a self-declaration signed by the applicant's authorised representative certifying the validity of its accounts for the last 2 financial years available must be provided.

In the event of an application grouping several applicants (consortium), the above thresholds apply to each applicant.

More comprehensive information on the documents to submit can be found at:

http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/grants_manual/lev/h2020-rules-lev-lear-fvc_en.pdf

In the event that the beneficiary's financial capacity is not satisfactory, the pre-financing payment may be subject to the receipt of a financial guarantee for up to the same amount as the pre-financing payment to be made.

8.2 Operational capacity

Applicants must have the professional competencies and appropriate qualifications necessary to complete the proposed Action for which the grant is sought. To assess this capacity, applicants must provide the following documents:

- description of the profiles of the people primarily responsible for managing and implementing the Action (e.g. accompanied by a *curriculum vitae*);
- the organisation's activity reports for at least the last year;
- a list of previous actions and activities carried out in equivalent actions in related fields

If compliant with the above-mentioned requirements, information submitted by applicants who have benefited from CEF Telecom support since 2014 may be taken into account in the evaluation of their operational capacity.

9. AWARD CRITERIA

Proposals will be evaluated against the following award criteria, which are defined in Annex 2 of the 2019–2020 Work Programme. These three criteria are **Relevance, Quality and efficiency of the implementation** and **Impact and sustainability** and are described below:

Relevance

- Alignment with the objectives and activities required for the deployment of the Digital Service Infrastructure described in Chapter 3 of the Work Programme and priorities set in section 2 of the call text.
- Alignment and synergies with EU long-term policy objectives, relevant policies, strategies and activities at European and national level.

Quality and efficiency of the implementation

- Maturity of the proposed solution (e.g. in terms of contribution towards interoperability, connectivity, sustainable deployment, operation, upgrading of trans-European digital service infrastructures, use of common building blocks, coordination at European level) and/or integration with existing components of the DSI.
- Coherence and effectiveness of the work plan, including appropriateness of the allocation of tasks and resources.
- Quality and relevant experience of the individual participants and, if more than one beneficiary, of the consortium as a whole (including complementarity, balance).
- Extent to which the proposal demonstrates support from national authorities, industry and NGOs (when relevant).
- Appropriate attention to security, privacy, inclusiveness and accessibility (when relevant).

Impact and sustainability

- Quality of the approach to facilitate wider deployment and take-up of the proposed Actions.
- Capability to survive, develop and scale up without European Union funding after the end of the project with a view to achieving long-term sustainability, where appropriate through funding sources other than CEF.

A score will be applied to each of the three award criteria on a scale from 0 (insufficient) to 5 (excellent). The threshold for individual criteria is 3. The overall threshold, applying to the sum of the three individual scores, is 10. Only proposals with a score on or above these thresholds (individual and overall) may be recommended for funding.

Ranking list

At the end of the evaluation by independent experts, all evaluated proposals will be ranked, according to the scores obtained for each of the award criteria as indicated above.

If necessary, a priority order for proposals which have obtained the same score within a ranked list will be determined. The following approach will be applied successively for every group of *ex aequo* proposals²³ requiring prioritisation, starting with the highest scored group, and continuing in descending order:

- i. Proposals submitted by organisations established in an eligible country which is not otherwise covered by more highly-ranked proposals, will be considered to have the highest priority (geographical coverage).
- ii. Proposals identified under (i), if any, will be prioritised according to the scores they have been awarded for the Relevance criterion. When these scores are equal, priority will be based on scores for the Impact and Sustainability criterion.

If a distinction still cannot be made, further prioritisation may be done by considering how to enhance the quality of the project portfolio through synergies between proposals, or other

²³ Proposals with the same overall score

factors related to the objectives of the call or to the CEF Work Programme in general. These factors will be documented in the evaluation report.

10. LEGAL COMMITMENTS

In the event of a grant awarded by the Commission, the applicant(s) will be invited by INEA to sign a grant agreement drawn up in euro and detailing the conditions and level of CEF funding, as well as the information on the procedure to formalise the agreement of the parties. The standard model grant agreement, available on the call page, is not negotiable and will be signed in English.

Submitting an application implies the acceptance of the terms and conditions of the model grant agreement. Applicants are recommended to carefully read this document and its annexes before submitting an application.

A coordinator must be designated for multi-beneficiary Actions. The coordinator will be the contact point for INEA and will have, *inter alia*, the responsibility for receiving the payment(s) and coordinating the reporting exercise(s). It is strongly recommended that beneficiaries sign an internal cooperation agreement regarding their operation and coordination, including all internal aspects related to the management of the beneficiaries and the implementation of the Action.

Two copies of the original agreement must be signed first by the beneficiary in case of mono-beneficiary grants or the coordinator on behalf of the consortium and returned to INEA immediately.

In accordance with Article 23 of the CEF Regulation, only Actions in conformity with EU law, in particular in the area of public procurement, and which are in line with the relevant EU policies in the area of telecommunications infrastructure shall be financed.

11. FINANCIAL PROVISIONS

11.1 Forms of the grant

11.1.1 Reimbursement of costs actually incurred²⁴

The grant will be defined by applying a maximum co-financing rate of 75% to the eligible costs and which are:

(a) actually incurred and declared by the beneficiary and its affiliated entities.

(b) a flat rate of 7 % of the eligible direct costs ('reimbursement of flat-rate costs') for the following categories of costs: indirect costs minus subcontracting costs within the meaning of

²⁴ Notwithstanding the form of grant, personnel costs may be declared on the basis of average costs calculated in accordance with the beneficiary's usual costs accounting practices, in compliance with the conditions laid down in Commission Implementing Decision C(2016)478 on the reimbursement of personnel costs of beneficiaries of the Connecting Europe Facility.

Article II.10 and costs of financial support to third parties within the meaning of Article II.11 ("reimbursement of flat-rate costs").

For details on eligibility of costs, please refer to section 11.2.

11.2 Eligible costs

Eligible costs are costs actually incurred by the beneficiary of a grant, which meet all the criteria laid down in Article 186 of the Financial Regulation.

The beneficiary's internal accounting and auditing procedures must permit direct reconciliation of the costs and revenue declared in respect of the action with the corresponding accounting statements and supporting documents.

The same criteria apply to the costs incurred by designated affiliated entities and implementing bodies.

Applicants' attention is drawn to points (3) to (8) of Article 8 of the CEF Regulation concerning the eligibility of costs. The full costs of purchase of equipment and infrastructure which are treated as capital expenditure are eligible under this call.

Costs may be eligible at the earliest from the date on which an application is submitted²⁵.

VAT

In line with the first subparagraph of Article 8(7) of the CEF Regulation and Article 186(4) (c) of the Financial Regulation, VAT paid by beneficiaries of grants awarded following this call for proposals is eligible except:

- deductible VAT (VAT paid by the beneficiary for the implementation of taxed activities or exempt activities with right of deduction);
- VAT paid for the implementation of activities engaged in as a public authority by the beneficiary where it is a Member State, regional or local government authority of a Member State or another body governed by public law of a Member State.

Financial support to third parties

The applications may not envisage provision of financial support to third parties.

Detailed information on eligible and ineligible costs is included in Article II.19 of the model grant agreement, which is available on the call webpage.

11.3 Reporting and payment arrangements

Actions will be eligible to receive a pre-financing of up to 50% of the maximum grant amount awarded that will be made within 30 days after the last party signs the grant agreement. No interim payment will be made.

²⁵ The date when the proposal was last submitted in the TENtec eSubmission module will be considered as the submission date of the proposal.

In the event that the beneficiary's financial capacity is not satisfactory, the pre-financing payment may be subject to the receipt of a financial guarantee for up to the same amount as the pre-financing payment to be made.

The financial guarantee, in euro, must be provided by an approved bank or financial institution established in one of the EU Member States. When the beneficiary is established in a third country, INEA may agree that a bank or financial institution established in that third country may provide the guarantee if the bank or financial institution is considered to offer equivalent security and characteristics as those offered by a bank or financial institution established in a Member State. Amounts blocked in bank accounts will not be accepted as financial guarantees.

The guarantee may be replaced by a joint or several guarantees provided by third parties or by a joint guarantee of the beneficiaries of an action that are parties to the same grant agreement. The guarantee will be released when the pre-financing is cleared against the interim payment, if applicable, and/or the balance of payment(s) made, in accordance with the conditions laid down in the grant agreement.

The final amount of the grant to be awarded to the beneficiary is established after completion of the Action, upon approval of the request for payment including, where applicable, the supporting documents as described in the model grant agreement.

11.4 Other financial conditions

a) Non-cumulative award

An Action may only receive one grant from the EU budget.

To ensure this, applicants must indicate in the application the sources and amounts of EU funding received or applied for the same Action or part of the Action, as well as any other funding received or applied for the same Action.

In this respect, any proposed Action or part(s) thereof that receives or has received EU funding under the CEF or other EU Programmes (e.g. European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), Horizon 2020, etc.) will not be funded under this call.

b) Non- retroactivity

No grant may be awarded retrospectively for Actions already completed.

A grant may be awarded for an Action which has already begun only where the applicant can demonstrate in the grant application the need to start the Action before the grant agreement is signed.

In such cases, costs eligible for financing may not have been incurred prior to the date of submission of the grant application.

c) No-profit

In accordance with Article 192 of the Financial Regulation, grants shall not have the purpose or effect of producing a profit within the framework of the Action. Where a profit is made, INEA will be entitled to recover the percentage of the profit corresponding to the EU contribution to the eligible costs actually incurred by the beneficiary to carry out the Action.

12. PUBLICITY

12.1 By the beneficiary

Beneficiaries must clearly acknowledge the European Union's contribution in all publications or in conjunction with activities for which the grant is used.

In this respect, beneficiaries are required to give prominence to the name and emblem of the European Commission and the reference to the CEF Programme on all their publications, posters, programmes and other products realised under the co-financed project.

12.2 By the Commission

All information relating to grants awarded in the course of a financial year shall be published on an internet site of the European Union institutions no later than the 30 June of the year following the financial year in which the grants were awarded.

13. PROCESSING OF PERSONAL DATA

The reply to any call for proposals involves the recording and processing of personal data (such as name, address and CV). Such data will be processed pursuant to Regulation (EU) 2018/1725²⁶ on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data by the Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies and on the free movement of such data. Unless indicated otherwise, the questions and any personal data requested that are required to evaluate the application in accordance with the call for proposal will be processed solely for that purpose by INEA.

Personal data may be registered in the Early Detection and Exclusion System by the Commission, should the beneficiary be in one of the situations mentioned in Articles 136 and 141 of the Financial Regulation. For more information see the Privacy Statement on: <https://ec.europa.eu/inea/en/connecting-europe-facility/cef-telecom/apply-funding/2020-digital-skills-jobs>.

²⁶ Regulation (EU) 2018/1725 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2018 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data by the Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Regulation (EC) No 45/2001 and Decision No 1247/2002/EC (OJ L 295, 21.11.2018, p. 39–98).

14. PROCEDURE FOR THE SUBMISSION OF PROPOSALS

Proposals must be submitted by the deadline set out under section 3.

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 to correct clerical mistakes, the Commission may contact the applicant during the evaluation process.

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

All practical information on this call for proposals and the evaluation process is detailed in the Guide for Applicants. It is available, together with the application forms, model grant agreement, the 2019–2020 Work Programme, and other relevant documents on the call webpage: <https://ec.europa.eu/inea/en/connecting-europe-facility/cef-telecom/apply-funding/2020-digital-skills-jobs>.

Applicants are requested to carefully read all call-related documents, including the detailed instructions given in the Guide for Applicants on how to complete their applications and other guidance documents and information, in particular the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ).

14.1 Application forms

Proposals must be submitted using the application forms provided on the call webpage at the link above. Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit their applications in English.

Proposals must be signed by the applicant(s) or its duly authorized representative and must be perfectly legible so that there can be no doubt as to words and figures.

The applicant(s) specified in application form part A will automatically be considered as the beneficiary(ies) if the proposal is selected for funding. If applicants designate affiliated entities within the meaning of Article 187 of the Financial Regulation to support the implementation of the submitted Action, information on these affiliated entities must be encoded in application form part A, and any relevant supporting documents must be provided.

For multi-applicant proposals, a coordinating applicant must be designated.

14.2 Submission process

Proposals must be submitted electronically using the TENtec eSubmission module, accessible via the following link:

<https://ec.europa.eu/inea/en/connecting-europe-facility/cef-telecom/apply-funding/2020-digital-skills-jobs>

before the call deadline: **12 May 2020 at 17:00.00 Brussels time** (*see also section 5 on Admissibility requirements*).

Application form part A is automatically generated by the eSubmission module. Application form parts B, C and D must be downloaded from the call webpage at the link above and duly

completed. Once final, these must be uploaded into the TENtec eSubmission module. The same applies to any other annexes or supporting documents accompanying the proposal.

Applicants' attention is drawn to the fact that for application form part A, only the information encoded in the TENtec eSubmission module will be taken into account for the evaluation (notwithstanding the requirement to upload signed versions of application forms part A2.2 and A2.3). For the other forms and documents, only the last version uploaded in the TENtec eSubmission module will be taken into account for the evaluation.

Any parts of the application that require signatures of applicants or relevant authorities must be scanned and uploaded into the TENtec eSubmission module. Applicants must be able to provide the original documents and send them to the INEA services upon request.

Advanced electronic signatures based on a qualified certificate²⁷ as defined by the eIDAS Regulation²⁸ and which comply with the signature formats specified in Commission Implementing Decision 2015/1506 will be accepted. If a document is e-signed, a printable version of the document must be uploaded in the TENtec eSubmission module.

15. INFORMATION FOR APPLICANTS

Further information or clarifications on the call for proposals will be published on the call webpage. Please refer to all of the following documents, available on the call webpage, when preparing the application:

- 2019–2020 Work Programme
- CEF Regulation
- Telecom Guidelines
- Application form (Parts A, B, C and D)
- Guide for Applicants
- FAQs published on the call page
- Model grant agreement
- Checklist of documents to be provided
- EU Financial Regulation
- Commission Decision on the reimbursement of personnel costs

Applicants are recommended to consult the webpage and the INEA website/Twitter feed (@inea_eu) regularly until the deadline for submission of proposals.

Questions related to this call must be addressed to the call helpdesk:
INEA-CEF-Telecom-Calls@ec.europa.eu.

The answers to submitted questions will be published in a FAQ list accessible via the call webpage, to ensure equal treatment of all potential applicants. Questions related to the call

²⁷ For a list of trusted certificate providers please see <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/eu-trusted-lists-trust-service-providers>

²⁸ Regulation (EU) No 910/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 July 2014 on electronic identification and trust services for electronic transactions in the internal market and repealing Directive 1999/93/EC, see <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.L..2014.257.01.0073.01.ENG>

should be submitted at the latest by **21 April 2020** to ensure sufficient time for the last update of the FAQs by **5 May 2020**. However, individual technical questions related to TENtec eSubmission module will be treated until the call deadline.

Questions which are specific to a particular proposal and for which the answer would provide a comparative advantage to the applicant will not be answered.

Please note that proposals must not be sent to the helpdesk e-mail address.