CONNECTING EUROPE FACILITY (CEF)
TRANS-EUROPEAN TELECOMMUNICATIONS NETWORKS

Guidance Notes on Evaluation
CALLS FOR PROPOSALS 2014
These Guidance Notes describe the evaluation criteria for CEF-Telecom proposals and the evaluation process / procedures. Its purpose is to provide you with information and guide you through the mechanics of preparing and submitting a proposal.

**General considerations**

The evaluation will be carried out by the Commission with the assistance of independent experts. The description of these are presented in the different sections below.

- Only proposals meeting the requirements of the admissibility condition, the eligibility and the exclusion criteria shall be evaluated further. The evaluation of proposals will be based on the principles of transparency and of equal treatment. Commission staff ensures that the process is fair.

- Experts perform evaluations on a personal basis, not as representatives of their employer, their country or any other entity. They are expected to be independent, impartial and objective, and to behave throughout in a professional manner. They sign an appointment letter, including a confidentiality and conflict of interest declaration before beginning their work. Confidentiality rules must be adhered to at all times, before, during and after the evaluation.

In addition, an independent expert or experts may be appointed by the Commission to observe the evaluation process from the point of view of its working and execution. The role of the observer(s) is to give independent advice to the Commission on the conduct and fairness of the evaluation sessions, on the way in which the experts apply the evaluation criteria, and on ways in which the procedures could be improved. The observer(s) will not express views on the proposals under examination or the experts' opinions on the proposals.

### Overview of the Evaluation Process – the different steps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Selection of Independent Experts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>During evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Eligibility Check</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Briefing of Experts &amp; Evaluation criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Individual assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Consensus meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Panel review</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Selection of Independent Experts

Independent experts wishing to assist with the evaluation of CEF-Telecom proposals should express their interest on other programmes by registering under “Other funding programmes” in the H2020 Participant Portal: [http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/experts/index.html](http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/experts/index.html)

Experts shall then be selected from this database on the basis of their ability to perform the tasks assigned to them, taking into account the thematic requirements of the call, and with consideration of geographical and gender balance.

In constituting the lists of experts, the Commission also takes account of their abilities to appreciate the industrial/public sector and/or societal dimension of the proposed work. Experts must also have the appropriate language skills required for the proposals to be evaluated.

Commission staff allocates proposals to individual experts, taking account of the fields of expertise of the experts, and avoiding conflicts of interest.

Conflicts of interest: Under the terms of their appointment letter, experts must declare beforehand any known conflicts of interest, and must immediately inform a Commission staff member if one becomes apparent during the course of the evaluation. The Commission will take whatever action is necessary to remove any conflict.

Confidentiality: The appointment letter also requires experts to maintain strict confidentiality with respect to the whole evaluation process. They must follow any instruction given by the Commission to ensure this. Under no circumstance may an expert attempt to contact an applicant on his own account, either during the evaluation or afterwards.

2. Admissibility and eligibility check

After receipt, proposals are registered and acknowledged. Their contents will be transferred into a database to support the evaluation process. All proposals will be assessed in accordance with the eligibility criteria to ensure that they conform to the eligibility requirements of the call, and to the submission procedure.

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<th>Admissibility conditions</th>
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<td>1) Timely submission as specified in the relevant Call for Proposals;</td>
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<td>2) Submission of a complete proposal (ensure that all administrative forms A, B, C, and the proposal description are present);</td>
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<td>3) Submission to the designated physical or electronic address;</td>
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<td>4) Formal conditions regarding documentation, packaging, number of copies, etc.</td>
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<th>Eligibility criteria</th>
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<td>1) Submissions by one or more Member States concerned, by international organisations, joint undertakings, or public or private undertakings or bodies established in Member States.</td>
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2) Submissions 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 Union’s financial interests equivalent to that offered by legal persons.

3) Submission by legal persons.

4) Submissions for the achievement of 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 this Regulation, except where it is indispensable to achieve the objectives of a given project of common interest.

Only proposals meeting the requirements of the admissibility conditions and the eligibility criteria shall be evaluated further.

Furthermore, applicants will be excluded from participation if:

i. they are bankrupt or being wound up, are having their affairs administered by the courts, have entered into an arrangement with creditors, have suspended business activities, are the subject of proceedings concerning those matters, or are in any analogous situation arising from a similar procedure provided for in national legislation or regulations;

ii. they or persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control over them have been convicted of an offence concerning their professional conduct by a judgment of a competent authority of a Member State which has the force of res judicata;

iii. they have been guilty of grave professional misconduct proven by any means which the contracting authority can justify including by decisions of the EIB and international organisations;

iv. they are not in compliance with their obligations relating to the payment of social security contributions or the payment of taxes in accordance with the legal

v. of the country in which they are established or with those of the country of the contracting authority or those of the country where the contract is to be performed;

vi. they or persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control over them have been the subject of a judgment which has the force of res judicata for fraud, corruption, involvement in a criminal organisation, money laundering or any other illegal activity, where such illegal activity is detrimental to the Union’s financial interests;

Applicants must certify that they are not in one of the situations listed above. Applicants making false declarations expose themselves to financial penalties and exclusion from grants and contracts\(^1\).

3. Expert Briefing, Selection and Award Criteria

At the beginning of the evaluation, experts will be briefed by Commission staff, covering the evaluation procedure, the experts’ responsibilities, the issues involved in the particular instrument/objective, and other relevant material.

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Each of the eligible proposals will be assessed individually by the experts in accordance with the predetermined selection and award criteria.

**Selection criteria**

Selection criteria will be applied to assess the applicant’s financial and operational capacity to carry out the project (refer to S1) and S2) below)

S1) Financial capacity to carry out the project:
   a) Applicants must have stable and sufficient sources of funding to maintain their activity throughout the period during which the action is being carried out.

S2) Operational capacity to carry out the project: Applicants must have:
   a) Professional competencies and qualifications required to complete the proposed work in the project;
   b) The capacity to allocate adequate human resources to carry out the project in question.

Selection criteria are initially applied on the basis of the information supplied in the proposal. If weaknesses (e.g. in terms of their financial capacity) are identified compensating actions such as financial guarantees or other mitigating measures may be considered.

Applicants that do not possess the operational and/or financial capacity to carry out the proposed actions may be excluded.

**Award criteria**

Award criteria are grouped in three categories (a detailed description of criteria including specific sub-criteria can be found below):

   A1) Relevance,
   A2) Quality and efficiency of the implementation
   A3) Impact and sustainability
<table>
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<th>Award criteria</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>A1) Relevance</strong></td>
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<td>a) The alignment with the general objectives of the Work Programme and with the addressed specific objective described under section 3 of the Work Programme.</td>
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<tr>
<td>b) The alignment and synergies with relevant policies, strategies and activities at European and national level.</td>
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<td><strong>A2) Quality and efficiency of the implementation</strong></td>
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<td>– 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,</td>
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<td>– Coherence and effectiveness of the work plan, including appropriateness of the allocation of tasks and resources.</td>
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<td>– Quality and relevant experience of the individual participants and, if more than one beneficiary, of the consortium as a whole (including complementarity, balance).</td>
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<td>– Extent to which the proposal demonstrates support from national authorities, industry and NGOs (when relevant)</td>
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<tr>
<td>– Appropriate attention to security, privacy, inclusiveness and accessibility (when relevant).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>A3) Impact and sustainability</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>a) Quality of the approach to facilitate wider deployment and take-up of the proposed actions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>b) 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.</td>
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A score will be applied to each of the three award criteria (not for the sub-criteria). The sub-criteria are issues which the expert should consider in the assessment of that criterion. They also act as reminders of issues to be raised later during the evaluation process.

For each award criteria a score from 0 to 5 is given (half points are possible):

- **0** - The proposal fails to address the criterion under examination or cannot be judged due to missing or incomplete information.
- **1** - Very poor: The criterion is addressed in an inadequate manner, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.
- **2** - Not satisfactory: While the proposal broadly addresses the criterion, there are significant weaknesses.
- **3** - Good: The proposal addresses the criterion well, although improvements would be necessary.
- **4** - Very Good: The proposal addresses the criterion very well, although certain improvements are still possible.
- **5** - Excellent: The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion in question. Any shortcomings are minor.

The respective thresholds for the award criteria are:

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<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Threshold</th>
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<td>A1</td>
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<td>A2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>A3</td>
<td>3</td>
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If a proposal fails to achieve one or more of the threshold scores, it will nevertheless be evaluated on all criteria in order to provide feedback to the consortium. However, proposals that are outside the scope of the Work Programme objectives will be marked '0' for the Relevance criterion – with the comment 'out of scope of the call'; they will not be further evaluated.

Based on the scores of the individual award criteria, a total score will be calculated for each proposal by adding the individual scores without any weighting factor.

Proposals responding to each of the objectives of the call will be ranked in groups on that basis. In the case of proposals with equal scores, their scores for the award criteria will be used to differentiate them by taking account of the scores in A1, A2 and A3 in descending order of priority.

**4. Evaluation – individual assessment**

Each proposal will first be assessed independently by several experts, chosen by the Commission from the pool of experts taking part in this evaluation. At this first step the experts are acting individually; they do not discuss the proposal with each other, nor with any third party. The experts record their individual opinions in an Individual Evaluation Report (IER), giving scores and also comments against the evaluation criteria.

When scoring proposals, experts must only apply the above criteria.

Experts will assess and mark the proposal exactly as it is described and presented. They do not make any assumptions or interpretations about the project in addition to what is in the proposal.

Concise but explicit justifications will be given for each score. Recommendations for improvements to be discussed as part of a possible Grant Agreement preparation phase will be given, if needed.
Signature of the IER also entails a declaration that the expert has no conflict of interest in evaluating the particular proposal.

5. Evaluation - Consensus meeting

Once all the experts to whom a proposal has been assigned have completed their IER, the evaluation progresses to a consensus assessment, representing their common views.

This entails a consensus meeting to discuss the scores awarded and to prepare comments.

The consensus discussion is moderated by a representative of the Commission. The role of the moderator is to seek to arrive at a consensus between the individual views of experts without any prejudice for or against particular proposals or the organisations involved, and to ensure a confidential, fair and equitable evaluation of each proposal according to the required evaluation criteria.

The moderator for the group may designate an expert to be responsible for drafting the consensus report ("rapporteur"). The experts attempt to agree on a consensus score for each of the criteria that have been evaluated and suitable comments to justify the scores. Comments should be suitable for feedback to the proposal coordinator. Scores and comments are set out in a consensus report.

If during the consensus discussion it is found to be impossible to bring all the experts to a common point of view on any particular aspects of the proposal, the Commission may ask up to three additional experts to examine the proposal.

The outcome of the consensus step is the Consensus Report (CR). This will be signed (either on paper, or electronically) by all experts, or as a minimum, by the rapporteur and the moderator. The moderator is responsible for ensuring that the consensus report reflects the consensus reached, expressed in scores and comments. In the case that it is impossible to reach a consensus, the report sets out the majority view of the experts but also records any dissenting views.

The Commission will take the necessary steps to assure the quality of the consensus reports, with particular attention given to clarity, consistency, and appropriate level of detail. If important changes are necessary, the reports will be referred back to the experts concerned.

The signing of the consensus report completes the consensus step.

6. Evaluation - Panel review

This is the final step involving the independent experts. It allows them to formulate their recommendations to the Commission having had an overview of the results of the consensus step.

The panel comprises experts involved at the consensus step with the experts who reviewed the other proposals in the area.

The main task of the panel is to examine and compare the consensus reports for a given area (which normally will be at the level of an objective but may also be at the level of a theme, if appropriate), to check on the consistency of the marks applied during the consensus discussions and, where necessary, propose a new set of consensus scores.

The tasks of the panel will also include:

- Resolving cases where a minority view was recorded in the consensus report;
• Recommending a priority order for proposals with the same score for all three award criteria;

The panel is chaired by the Commission. The Commission will ensure fair and equal treatment of the proposals in the panel discussions. A panel rapporteur will be appointed to draft the panel’s advice.

The outcome of the panel meeting is a report recording, principally:
• An Evaluation Summary Report (ESR) for each proposal;
• A list of proposals passing all thresholds, along with a final score for each proposal passing the thresholds and the panel recommendations for priority order;
• A list of evaluated proposals having failed one or more thresholds;
• A list of any proposals having been found ineligible;
• A summary of the deliberations of the panel.

If a panel has considered proposals to various parts of the call (e.g. different objectives or themes) the report may contain accordingly multiple priority lists, if appropriate.

The panel report is signed by at least three panel experts and the Commission chairperson. A copy of the Evaluation Summary Report will be sent to each proposal coordinator.
Glossary

The following explanations are provided for clarity and easy-reference. They have no legal authority, and do not replace any official definitions set out in the relevant legal acts (e.g. Decision establishing the CEF Telecom Financial Regulation and its Implementing Rules, model grant agreement for CEF).

A

Acknowledgement of receipt

Applicants are informed electronically after the deadline that a proposal has been successfully submitted (but not that it is necessarily eligible). Contact the CEF Telecom Help Desk urgently if you do not receive such an acknowledgement.

Applicant

The term used generally in this guide for a person or entity applying to the CEF Telecommunications Infrastructures Programme. The term ‘participant’ is used in the more limited sense of a member of a proposal or project consortium.

Award criteria

These are part of the evaluation criteria on the basis of which proposals will be assessed. The award criteria are generally the same for all proposals throughout CEF-Telecom, and relate to relevance, impact and implementation.

B

Beneficiary

Signatory to a grant agreement with the European Union, represented by the European Commission

C

Call for proposals (or "call"): An announcement, usually in the Official Journal, that opens parts of a Work Programme for proposals, indicating what types of actions are required. Full information on the call can be found on the INEA website.

CEF

Connecting Europe Facility
Consensus discussion/meeting

The stage in the proposal evaluation process when experts come together to establish a common view on a particular proposal.

Coordinator

The member of the consortium who acts as the point of contact with the Commission.

Data protection policy

The personal data collected in the context of the call for proposals will be processed in accordance with the Regulation (EC) No 45/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2000 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data by the Community institutions and bodies and on the free movement of such data (OJ L8, 12.01.2001, p.1).

Deadline

For a particular call, the moment after which proposals will not be received by the Commission, and when the Proposal Submission Service closes for that call. Deadlines are strictly enforced.

Deliverable

A deliverable represents a verifiable output of the project. Normally, each work package will produce one or more deliverables during its lifetime. Deliverables are often written reports but can also take another form, for example the completion of a prototype etc.

Direct costs

Direct costs are all eligible costs which can be attributed directly to the project and are identified by the participant as such, in accordance with its accounting principles and its usual internal rules.

Early Warning System (EWS)

An internal information tool of the Commission to flag identified financial risks related to beneficiaries.

Eligible costs

These are costs accepted by the Commission as being reimbursable (up to the limits established in the grant agreement).

Eligibility criteria

The minimum conditions which a proposal must fulfil to be eligible for evaluation.
Evaluation

The process by which proposals are, or are not, retained with a view to selection as projects. Evaluation is conducted through the application of eligibility, award and selection criteria identified in a work programme. The evaluation is conducted by the Commission assisted by independent experts.

Evaluation criteria

The eligibility, award and selection criteria against which proposals are assessed.

Evaluation Summary Report (ESR)

The assessment of a particular proposal following the evaluation by independent experts. It normally contains both comments and scores for each evaluation criterion.

Financial Regulation and its Rules of Application


Grant

Grants are direct financial contributions covered by a written agreement, by way of donation, from the Union budget in order to finance either an action intended to help achieve an objective forming part of a European Union policy; or the functioning of a body which pursues an aim of general European interest or has an objective forming part of a European Union policy.

Grant Agreement

Agreement between the Commission and the beneficiaries setting out the conditions of the awarding of Union grants.

Grant Agreement preparation

The process of establishing a grant agreement between the Commission and an applicant whose proposal has been favourably evaluated, and when funds are available.

Indirect costs
Indirect costs, (sometimes called overheads), are all those eligible costs which cannot be identified by the participant as being directly attributed to the project, but which can be identified and justified by its accounting system as being incurred in direct relationship with the eligible direct costs attributed to the project.

Individual assessment

The stage in the evaluation process when experts assess the merits of a particular proposal before discussion with their peers.

Information day

Open event organised by the Commission to explain the characteristics of specific calls, and often as well, a chance for potential applicants to meet and discuss proposal ideas and collaborations.

Initial information letter

A letter sent by the Commission to applicants shortly after the evaluation by experts, giving a report from the experts on the proposal in question (the Evaluation Summary report).

Objectives

In the context CEF Telecommunications these are a number of objectives which have been defined and described in the Work Programme. Each proposal must address one of these objectives.

OJ

Official Journal of the European Union

P

Part A

The part of a proposal dealing with administrative data.

Part B

The part of a proposal explaining the work to be carried out, and the roles and aptitudes of the participants in the consortium.

Part C

The part of a proposal providing financial information about the applicant.

Part D

The part of the proposal providing Guidance Notes for Experts.
Participants

The members of a consortium in a proposal or project.

Programme committee for CEF-Telecom

A group of official national representatives who controls the Commission's implementation of the CEF Telecommunications Program.

Proposal

A description of the planned activities, information on who will carry them out, how much they will cost, and how much funding is requested.

Public body

Public body means any legal entity established as such by national law, and international organisations.

Reserve list

Due to budgetary constraints it may not be possible to support all proposals that have been evaluated positively. In such conditions, proposals on a reserve list may only be financed if funds become available following the Grant Agreement preparation of projects on the main list.

Selection criteria

These are part of the evaluation criteria on the basis of which proposals will be assessed. The selection criteria relate to the applicant's financial and operational capacity to carry out the project.

SME

Small or medium sized enterprise: It is an enterprise that satisfies the criteria laid down in Commission Recommendation 2003/361/EC of 6 May 2003 concerning the definition of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (OJ L 124, 20.05.2003, p. 36 )
- employs fewer than 250 persons;
- has an annual turnover not exceeding 50 million Euro,
- and/or an annual balance sheet total not exceeding 43 million Euro.
For a proposal to be considered for funding, the evaluation scores for individual criteria must reach certain thresholds. There is also an overall threshold for the sum of the scores.

W

Work package

A work package is a major sub-division of the proposed project with a verifiable end-point - normally a deliverable or a milestone in the overall project.

Work Programme

A formal document of the Commission that sets out the objectives and topics to be addressed. It also contains information that is set out further in this guide, including the schedule and details of the calls for proposals, indicative budgets, and the evaluation procedure.