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Support for information measures relating to the EU Cohesion policy

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1. INTRODUCTION – BACKGROUND

This is a call for proposals for funding information measures within the meaning of Article 58 (1) (f) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 from appropriations in the 2020 budget as announced by Commission Decision C(2020) 305 of 27.1.2020¹.

The political agenda of the European Union for the next years includes decisions of major importance for the future of the EU: a wide-ranging debate is taking place about the priorities on which the EU should focus. In parallel, a new multi-annual financial framework covering the period after 2020 will soon be adopted and new programmes and funding mechanisms will be set up to implement them.

In this context, it is important that future decisions about priorities for the EU take adequately into account the contribution of Cohesion policy² to delivering on the EU's priorities and its potential to help reconnect the EU with its citizens.

The Cohesion policy provides investments in all regions in the EU in order to support job creation, business competitiveness, economic growth, sustainable development, and improve citizens' quality of life across the EU's 276 regions. These investments – which represent a third of the total EU budget - help to deliver on the EU's political priorities. They represent the most tangible and concrete proof of the EU's impact in the daily life of millions of citizens.

However, citizens are still insufficiently aware of the results of Cohesion policy and their impacts on their lives. To enable an informed debate about future priorities for the EU and ensure more transparency on how the EU's funds are being used and with what results, citizens should have a better knowledge and awareness of the investment in their countries, regions and cities.

The European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the EU have repeatedly emphasised the need to increase visibility of the EU's Cohesion policy, as illustrated by the General Affairs Council Conclusions³ on *'Bringing Cohesion policy closer to the citizens'*, by the European Parliament resolution⁴ on *'Increasing engagements of partners and visibility in the performance of European Structural and Investment Funds'* and by the proposals from the Joint communication actions⁵ on Cohesion policy put forward by the European Commission.

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/tender/pdf/official/2020_financing_decision_ta.pdf

² http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/what/investment-policy/

³ <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/gac/2017/04/25/>

⁴ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+REPORT+A8-2017-0201+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=en>

⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/informing/events/3005-pamhagen/20170523_joint_communication_actions.pdf

Within the current legal framework governing the implementation of the EU's Investment and Structural Funds⁶, this call for proposals aims to provide support for the production and dissemination of information and content linked to the EU Cohesion policy, while respecting complete editorial independence of the actors involved.

2. OBJECTIVE(S) – THEME(S) – PRIORITIES

With the current call for proposals, the European Commission seeks to select potential beneficiaries for the implementation of a number of information measures⁷ co-financed by the EU. The main aim is to provide support for the production and dissemination of information and content linked to EU Cohesion policy⁸, including inter alia the Just Transition Fund⁹ and the recovery plan for Europe¹⁰, while respecting complete editorial independence of the actors involved.

The exact content of the proposed information measures will depend on the editorial choice of the applicants. The editorial independence will be guaranteed by a charter of independence that will be part of the agreement signed between the European Commission and the grant beneficiaries.

The specific objectives of this call for proposals are:

- To promote and foster a better understanding of the role of Cohesion policy in supporting all EU's regions;
- To increase awareness of projects funded by the EU - through Cohesion policy in particular - and of their impact on people's lives;
- To disseminate information and encourage an open dialogue on Cohesion policy, its results, its role in delivering on the EU's political priorities and on its future;
- To encourage civic participation in matters related to Cohesion policy and to foster citizens' participation to setting priorities for the future of this policy.

The proposals shall illustrate and assess the role of Cohesion policy in delivering the European Commission's political priorities and in addressing current and future

⁶ Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 (in particular Articles 115-117 therein and Annex XII).

⁷ For the purpose of this call for proposals, an 'information measure' is a self-contained and coherent set of information activities relating to the EU Cohesion policy.

⁸ With this call for proposals the European Commission is supporting information measures relating to the EU Cohesion policy, which is delivered through three main funds: the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Cohesion Fund (CF) and the European Social Fund (ESF). In this sense, a project which addresses the impact of any of these three Funds in a region is eligible.

⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/actions-being-taken-eu/just-transition-mechanism/just-transition-funding-sources_en

¹⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/health/coronavirus-response/recovery-plan-europe_en

challenges for the EU, its Member States, its regions and the local level. More specifically, they should relate to the contribution of Cohesion policy to:

- boosting jobs, growth and investment at the regional and national level, and improving citizens' quality of life;
- helping deliver on the EU's and Member States' major priorities – which include, in addition to job and growth creation, addressing climate change, protecting environment, enhancing research and innovation, among others;
- enhancing economic, social and territorial cohesion in the EU while reducing disparities between and within EU countries and regions;
- helping regions harness globalisation by finding their niche in the world economy;
- reinforcing the European project as Cohesion policy directly serves EU citizens.

The expected results and outputs are the following:

- To increase media coverage on Cohesion policy, in particular at regional level;
- To enhance people's awareness of the results of Cohesion policy and their impact on their lives;
- To achieve concrete outputs and deliverables aimed at wide outreach within the measure's duration – e.g. TV and radio broadcast, online or print coverage, other type of information measures and dissemination - taking multilingualism into account;
- To establish an efficient and effective collaboration between the European Commission and the grant beneficiaries.

The target audience of the information measures to be implemented through this call is the general public and/or related stakeholders. More specifically:

- For the general public: the objective is to raise public awareness of the results of Cohesion policy and their impact on citizens' lives to Europeans who are unaware of the EU and of the EU action in their region. Information should focus on developing greater understanding of the contribution of Cohesion policy to boosting jobs and growth in Europe and reducing disparities among Member States and regions.
- For stakeholders: the objective is to engage with stakeholders (including national, regional and local authorities, beneficiaries, businesses, academia) to further communicate the impact of Cohesion policy on their regions and to feed into the discussion on the future of Cohesion policy and, more broadly, the future of Europe.

3. TIMETABLE

	Steps	Date and time or indicative period
(a)	Publication of the call	13/10/2020
(b)	Deadline for submitting applications	12/01/2021
(c)	Evaluation period	February to April 2021
(d)	Information to applicants	May 2021
(e)	Signature of grant agreements	June to August 2021

4. BUDGET AVAILABLE

The total budget earmarked for the co-financing of projects under this call for proposals is estimated at 5.000.000 €

The grant amount will be maximum EUR 300 000.

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

5. ADMISSIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

In order to be admissible, applications must be:

- sent no later than the deadline for submitting applications referred to in section 3;
- submitted in writing (see section 14), using the application form available at https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/newsroom/funding-opportunities/calls-for-proposal/; and
- drafted in one of the EU official languages.

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

6. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

6.1. Eligible applicants

Proposals may be submitted by any of the following applicants¹¹:

- media organisations/news agencies (television, radio, written press, online media, new media, combination of different media);
- non-profit organizations;
- universities and educational institutions;
- research centres and think-tanks;
- associations of European interest;
- private entities;

¹¹ This list is not exhaustive.

- public authorities¹² (national, regional and local), with the exception of the authorities in charge of the implementation of Cohesion policy in accordance with Art 123. of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013.

Natural persons as well as entities established for the sole purpose of the implementation of the projects within this call for proposals are not eligible.

Applicants who participated in the calls launched by the European Commission in 2017, 2018 and 2019 (Call for proposals 2017CE16BAT063, 2018CE16BAT042, and 2019CE16BAT117 respectively, for "Support for information measures relating to the EU Cohesion policy") are eligible notwithstanding the outcome of their previous applications.

Please be aware that following the entry into force of the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement¹³ 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 residents and entities are therefore eligible to participate under this call.]

Country of establishment

Only applications from legal entities established in the following countries are eligible:

- EU Member States;

Supporting documents

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

- **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);
- **public entity:** copy of the resolution, decision or other official document establishing the public-law entity;
- **natural persons:** photocopy of identity card and/or passport; certificate of liability to VAT, if applicable (e.g. some self-employed persons)
- **entities without legal personality:** documents providing evidence that their representative(s) have the capacity to undertake legal obligations on their behalf.

Please note that, in the course of the procedure, applicants may be requested to register and provide a Participant Identification Code (PIC, 9-digit number), serving as the unique identifier of their organisation in the Participant Register. Applicants will receive instructions on how to create a PIC in due time.

¹² Public law bodies or bodies governed by private law with a public service mission.

¹³ Agreement on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community.

Upon communication of the applicant's PIC, the EU Validation Services (Research Executive Agency Validation Services) will contact the applicant (via the messaging system embedded in the Participant Register) and request the latter to provide the supporting documents necessary to prove the legal existence and status of the organisation. All necessary details and instructions will be provided via this separate notification.

6.2. Eligible activities

The eligible activities shall be those necessary to carry out the information measure and realise the intended outputs/results in accordance with the objectives, themes and target audience as listed under section 2 of this call for proposals.

A. The measures should be implemented within the EU at local, regional, multiregional, national level, or at the level of several Member States.

B. The proposals should include one or several activities and tools having an innovative character with a view to attaining the objectives, cover the themes and reach the target audience.

C. Measures **required** by law or under the specific public service contracts (in the case of publicly owned entities) are not eligible.

6.3. Implementation period

Applicants are invited to submit proposals for projects with a maximum duration of 12 months.

7. EXCLUSION CRITERIA

7.1. Exclusion

The authorising officer shall exclude an applicant from participating in call for proposals procedures where:

- (a) the applicant is bankrupt, subject to insolvency or winding-up procedures, its assets are being administered by a liquidator or by a court, it is in an arrangement with creditors, its business activities are suspended, or it is in any analogous situation arising from a similar procedure provided for under EU or 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;
- (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 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 Union 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 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.

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 Regulation¹⁴, by filling in the relevant form attached to the application form accompanying the call for proposals and available at https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/newsroom/funding-opportunities/calls-for-proposal/.

This obligation may be fulfilled in one of the following ways:

For mono-beneficiary grants:

- (i) the applicant signs a declaration in its name and on behalf of its affiliated entities; OR
- (ii) the applicant and its affiliated entities each sign a separate declaration in their own name.

For multi-beneficiary grants:

- (i) the coordinator of a consortium signs a declaration on behalf of all applicants and their affiliated entities; OR
- (ii) each applicant in the consortium signs a declaration in its name and on behalf of its affiliated entities; OR
- (iii) each applicant in the consortium and the affiliated entities each sign a separate declaration in their own name.

8. SELECTION CRITERIA

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 following supporting documents to be submitted with the application:

- a) Low value grants (\leq EUR 60 000):
 - a declaration on their honour.
- b) Grants $>$ EUR 60 000:
 - a declaration on their honour, and

on request only

- the profit and loss account as well as the balance sheet for the last two financial years for which the accounts were closed;
- for newly created entities: the business plan might replace the above documents;

¹⁴ Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 July 2018 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union (OJ L 193, 30.7.2018, p.1)

On the basis of the documents submitted, if the Commission considers that financial capacity is weak, s/he may:

- request further information;
- decide not to give pre-financing;
- decide to give pre-financing paid in instalments;
- decide to give pre-financing covered by a bank guarantee (see section 11.6.2 below);
- where applicable, require the joint and several financial liability of all the co-beneficiaries.

If the Responsible Authorising Officer considers that the financial capacity is insufficient s/he will reject the application.

8.2. Operational capacity

Applicants must have the professional competencies as well as appropriate qualifications necessary to complete the proposed action. In this respect, applicants have to submit a declaration on their honour, and the following supporting documents:

- a list of previous projects/activities performed and related to the call or a list of activities that have been carried out in the last two years (maximum 4 projects/activities).

Additional supporting documents may be requested to confirm the operational capacity.

9. AWARD CRITERIA

Eligible applications/projects will be assessed on the basis of the following criteria:

	Criteria	Elements to be taken into consideration	Weighting (points)
1.	Relevance of the measure and contribution to the objectives of the call for proposals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevance of the objectives of the proposal with regard to the objectives and priorities of the call for proposals • Relevance of the types of information actions used with regards to the region(s) • Added value to existing initiatives across the regions in Europe • Innovative character of the project with regard to the evolution of the communication landscape. 	30 points; (minimum threshold 50%)

2.	Outreach and effectiveness of the measure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific, measurable, attainable and relevant objectives in terms of outreach and dissemination • Ability of the outreach plan (including for example a broadcast schedule, channel(s) of distribution and number of guaranteed contacts based on previous records) to maximise reach per target audience at local, regional, multiregional and national level (multiplier effect), for example via cooperation of applicants with networks and/or regional actors/media • Effectiveness of proposed methodologies to reach the objectives of this call, including methods to: produce content, monitor progress, ensure editorial independence, build technical solutions and evaluate the results of the project • Publicity planned for the activities and methods used for the dissemination of results • Possibilities for continuation of the project beyond the requested period of EU support 	40 points; (minimum threshold 50%)
3.	Efficiency of the measure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost-effectiveness in terms of the proposed resources, taking into account costs as well as expected results 	20 points; minimum threshold 50%)
4.	Organisation of the project team and quality of the project management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of the proposed coordination mechanisms, quality control systems and arrangements to manage risks • Quality of the allocation of tasks in view of implementing the activities of the proposed measure 	10 points; minimum threshold 50%)

A maximum of 100 points will be awarded for the quality of the proposal. The required minimum overall score is 60 points out of 100, while a minimum score of 50 % is required for each criterion. Only the proposals meeting the above-mentioned quality thresholds will be put onto the ranking list. Reaching the threshold does not automatically imply award of the grant.

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 applicant, as well as the information on the procedure to formalise the agreement of the parties.

Two copies of the original agreement must be signed first by the beneficiary or the coordinator on behalf of the consortium and returned to the Commission immediately. The Commission will sign it last.

The applicants understand that submission of a grant application implies acceptance of the general conditions attached to this call for proposals. These general conditions bind the beneficiary to whom the grant is awarded and shall constitute an annex to the grant decision.

11. FINANCIAL PROVISIONS

11.1. Forms of the grant

11.1.1 Reimbursement of costs actually incurred

The grant will be defined by applying a maximum co-financing rate of 80 % to the eligible costs actually incurred and declared by the beneficiary and its affiliated entities.

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

11.1.2 Reimbursement of eligible costs declared on the basis of a flat-rate

The grant will be defined by applying a maximum co-financing rate of 80 % to the eligible costs declared by the beneficiary and its affiliated entities on the basis of:

- (a) a flat rate of 7 % of the eligible direct costs ('reimbursement of flat-rate costs') for the following categories of costs: indirect costs.

The flat rate will be paid following acceptance of the costs to which the flat rate is to be applied.

11.2. Eligible costs

Eligible costs shall meet all the following criteria:

- they are incurred by the beneficiary.
- they are incurred during the duration of the action, with the exception of costs relating to final reports and audit certificates;
 - The period of eligibility of costs will start as specified in the grant agreement.
 - If a beneficiary can demonstrate the need to start the action before the agreement is signed, the costs eligibility period may start before that signature. Under no circumstances can the eligibility period start before the date of submission of the grant application.
- they are indicated in the estimated budget of the action;

- they are necessary for the implementation of the action which is the subject of the grant;
- they are identifiable and verifiable, in particular being recorded in the accounting records of the beneficiary and determined according to the applicable accounting standards of the country where the beneficiary is established and according to the usual cost accounting practices of the beneficiary;
- they comply with the requirements of applicable tax and social legislation;
- they are reasonable, justified, and comply with the principle of sound financial management, in particular regarding economy and efficiency.

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

The same criteria apply to costs incurred by the affiliated entities.

Eligible costs may be direct or indirect.

11.2.1. Eligible direct costs

The eligible direct costs for the action are those costs which:

with due regard to the conditions of eligibility set out above, are identifiable as specific costs directly linked to the performance of the action and which can therefore be booked to it directly, such as :

- (a) the costs of personnel working under an employment contract with the beneficiary or an equivalent appointing act and assigned to the action, provided that these costs are in line with the beneficiary's usual policy on remuneration.

Those costs include actual salaries plus social security contributions and other statutory costs included in the remuneration. They may also comprise additional remunerations, including payments on the basis of supplementary contracts regardless of the nature of those contracts, provided that they are paid in a consistent manner whenever the same kind of work or expertise is required, independently from the source of funding used;

The costs of natural persons working under a contract with the beneficiary other than an employment contract or who are seconded to the beneficiary by a third party against payment may also be included under such personnel costs, provided that the following conditions are fulfilled:

- (i) the person works under conditions similar to those of an employee (in particular regarding the way the work is organised, the tasks that are performed and the premises where they are performed);
- (ii) the result of the work belongs to the beneficiary (unless exceptionally agreed otherwise); and
- (iii) the costs are not significantly different from the costs of staff performing similar tasks under an employment contract with the beneficiary;

The recommended methods for the calculation of direct personnel costs are provided in Appendix.

- (b) costs of travel and related subsistence allowances, provided that these costs are in line with the beneficiary's usual practices on travel;
- (c) the depreciation costs of equipment or other assets (new or second-hand) as recorded in the beneficiary's accounting statements, provided that the asset:
 - (i) is written off in accordance with the international accounting standards and the beneficiary's usual accounting practices; and
 - (ii) has been purchased in accordance with the rules on implementation contracts laid down in the grant agreement, if the purchase occurred within the implementation period;

The costs of renting or leasing equipment or other assets are also eligible, provided that these costs do not exceed the depreciation costs of similar equipment or assets and are exclusive of any finance fee;

Only the portion of the equipment's depreciation, rental or lease costs corresponding to the implementation period and the rate of actual use for the purposes of the action may be taken into account when determining the eligible costs. By way of exception, the full cost of purchase of equipment may be eligible under the Special Conditions, if this is justified by the nature of the action and the context of the use of the equipment or assets;

- (d) costs of consumables and supplies, provided that they:
 - (i) are purchased in accordance with the rules on implementation contracts laid down in the grant agreement; and
 - (ii) are directly assigned to the action;
- (e) costs arising directly from requirements imposed by the Agreement (dissemination of information, specific evaluation of the action, audits, translations, reproduction), including the costs of requested financial guarantees, provided that the corresponding services are purchased in accordance with the rules on implementation contracts laid down in the grant agreement;
- (f) costs derived from subcontracts, provided that specific conditions on subcontracting as laid down in the grant agreement are met;
- (g) costs of financial support to third parties, provided that the conditions laid down in the grant agreement are met;
- (h) duties, taxes and charges paid by the beneficiary, notably value added tax (VAT), provided that they are included in eligible direct costs, and unless specified otherwise in the grant agreement.

11.2.2. Eligible indirect costs (overheads)

Indirect costs are costs that are not directly linked to the action implementation and therefore cannot be attributed directly to it.

A flat-rate amount of 7 % of the total eligible direct costs of the action, is eligible as indirect costs, representing the beneficiary's general administrative costs which can be regarded as chargeable to the action/project.

Indirect costs may not include costs entered under another budget heading.

Applicants' attention is drawn to the fact that if they are receiving an operating grant financed by the EU or Euratom budget, they may not declare indirect costs for the period(s) covered by the operating grant, unless they can demonstrate that the operating grant does not cover any costs of the action.

In order to demonstrate this, in principle, the beneficiary should:

- a. use *analytical cost accounting that allows to separate all costs (including overheads)* attributable to the operating grant and the action grant. For that purpose the beneficiary should use *reliable accounting codes and allocation keys* ensuring that *the allocation* of the costs is done in a *fair, objective and realistic way*.
- b. *record separately*:
 - all costs incurred for the operating grants (i.e. personnel, general running costs and other operating costs linked to the part of its usual annual activities), and
 - all costs incurred for the action grants (including the actual indirect costs linked to the action)

If the operating grant covers the entire usual annual activity and budget of the beneficiary, the latter is not entitled to receive any indirect costs under the action grant.

11.3. Ineligible costs

The following items are not considered as eligible costs:

- a) return on capital and dividends paid by a beneficiary;
- b) debt and debt service charges;
- c) provisions for losses or debts;
- d) interest owed;
- e) doubtful debts;
- f) exchange losses;
- g) costs of transfers from the Commission charged by the bank of a beneficiary;
- h) costs declared by the beneficiary under another action receiving a grant financed from the Union budget. Such grants include grants awarded by a Member State and financed from the Union budget and grants awarded by bodies other than the Commission for the purpose of implementing the Union budget. In particular, beneficiaries receiving an operating grant financed by the EU or Euratom budget cannot declare indirect costs for the period(s) covered by the operating grant,

unless they can demonstrate that the operating grant does not cover any costs of the action.

- i) contributions in kind from third parties;
- j) excessive or reckless expenditure;
- k) deductible VAT.

VAT¹⁵ will be ineligible when the activities to be supported through the grant are taxed activities/exempt activities with right of deduction or activities engaged in by bodies governed by public law acting as a public authority of a Member State (i.e. activities resulting from the exercise of sovereign powers or prerogatives exercised by Member States under the special legal regime applicable to them in line with Article 13(1) of Council Directive 2006/112/EC¹⁶: e.g. police, justice, definition and enforcement of public policies, etc.).

11.4. Balanced budget

The estimated budget of the action must be attached to the application form. It must have revenue and expenditure in balance.

The budget must be drawn up in euros.

Applicants for whom costs will not be incurred in euros should use the exchange rate published on the Infor-euro website available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/budget/contracts_grants/info_contracts/inforeuro/inforeuro_en.cfm

The applicant must ensure that the resources which are necessary to carry out the action are not entirely provided by the EU grant.

Co-financing of the action may take the form of:

- the beneficiary's own resources,
- income generated by the action or work programme,
- financial contributions from third parties.

11.5. Calculation of the final grant amount

The final amount of the grant is calculated by the Commission at the time of the payment of the balance. The calculation involves the following steps:

Step 1 — Application of the reimbursement rate to the eligible costs and addition of the flat-rate

The amount under step 1 is obtained by applying the reimbursement rate specified in section 11.1.1 to the eligible costs actually incurred and accepted by the Commission, including costs declared in the form of flat rates to which the co-financing rate applies in accordance with section 11.1.2.

¹⁵ Article 186 (4) (c) of the Financial Regulation

¹⁶ OJ L 347, 11.12.2006, p.1

Step 2 — Limit to the maximum amount of the grant

The total amount paid to the beneficiaries by the Commission may in no circumstances exceed the maximum amount of the grant as indicated in the grant agreement. If the amount obtained following Step 1 is higher than this maximum amount, the final amount of the grant is limited to the latter.

If volunteers' work is declared as part of direct eligible costs, the final amount of the grant is limited to the amount of total eligible costs approved by the Commission minus the amount of volunteers' work approved by the Commission.

Step 3 — Reduction due to the no-profit rule

'Profit' means the surplus of receipts over the total eligible costs of the action, where receipts are the amount obtained following Steps 1 and 2 plus the revenue generated by the action for beneficiaries and affiliated entities other than non-profit organisations.

In-kind and financial contributions by third parties are not considered receipts.

The total eligible costs of the action are the consolidated total eligible costs approved by the Commission. The revenue generated by the action is the consolidated revenue established, generated or confirmed for beneficiaries and affiliated entities other than non-profit organisations on the date on which the request for payment of the balance is drawn up.

If there is a profit, it will be deducted in proportion to the final rate of reimbursement of the actual eligible costs of the action approved by the Commission.

Step 4 — Reduction due to improper implementation or breach of other obligations

The Commission may reduce the maximum amount of the grant if the action has not been implemented properly (i.e. if it has not been implemented or has been implemented poorly, partially or late), or if another obligation under the Agreement has been breached.

The amount of the reduction will be proportionate to the degree to which the action has been implemented improperly or to the seriousness of the breach.

11.6. Reporting and payment arrangements

11.6.1 Payment arrangements

The beneficiary may request the following payments provided that the conditions of the grant agreement are fulfilled (e.g. payment deadlines, ceilings, etc.). The payment requests shall be accompanied by the documents provided below and detailed in the grant agreement:

Payment request	Accompanying documents
A pre-financing payment corresponding to 40 % of the maximum grant amount	financial guarantee (see section 11.6.2)
One interim payment : For the purpose of determining the amount due as interim payment, the reimbursement rate to	(a) interim technical report (b) interim financial statement

<p>be applied to the eligible costs approved by the Commission shall be 80 %.</p> <p>The interim payment shall not exceed 40% of the maximum grant amount.</p> <p>The total amount of pre-financing and interim payments shall not exceed 80 % of the maximum grant amount.</p>	
<p>Payment of the balance</p> <p>The Commission will establish the amount of this payment on the basis of the calculation of the final grant amount (see section 11.5 above). If the total of earlier payments is higher than the final grant amount, the beneficiary will be required to reimburse the amount paid in excess by the Commission through a recovery order.</p>	<p>(a) final technical report (b) final financial statement (c) summary financial statement aggregating the financial statements already submitted previously and indicating the receipts</p>

In case of a weak financial capacity, section 8.1 above applies.

11.6.2 Pre-financing guarantee

A pre-financing guarantee for up to the same amount as the pre-financing may be requested in order to limit the financial risks linked to the pre-financing payment.

The financial guarantee, in euro, shall 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, the Commission may agree that a bank or financial institution established in that third country may provide the guarantee if it considers that the bank or financial institution offers equivalent security and characteristics as those offered by a bank or financial institution established in a Member State. Amounts blocked in bank accounts shall not be accepted as financial guarantees.

The guarantee may be replaced by:

- a joint and several guarantee by a third party or,
- a joint guarantee of the beneficiaries of an action who are parties to the same grant agreement.

The guarantee shall be released as the pre-financing is gradually cleared against interim payments or the payment of the balance, in accordance with the conditions laid down in the grant agreement.

As an alternative to requesting a guarantee on pre-financing, the Commission may decide to split the payment of pre-financing into several instalments.

11.7. Other financial conditions

a) Non-cumulative award

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

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) Implementation contracts/subcontracting

Where the implementation of the action requires the award of procurement contracts (implementation contracts), the beneficiary may award the contract in accordance with its usual purchasing practices provided that the contract is awarded to the tender offering best value for money or the lowest price (as appropriate), avoiding conflicts of interest.

The beneficiary is expected to clearly document the tendering procedure and retain the documentation in the event of an audit.

Entities acting in their capacity as contracting authorities within the meaning of Directive 2014/24/EU¹⁷ or contracting entities within the meaning of Directive 2014/25/EU¹⁸ must comply with the applicable national public procurement rules.

Beneficiaries may subcontract tasks forming part of the action. If they do so, they must ensure that, in addition to the above-mentioned conditions of best value for money and absence of conflicts of interests, the following conditions are also complied with:

- a) subcontracting does not cover core tasks of the action;
- b) recourse to subcontracting is justified because of the nature of the action and what is necessary for its implementation;
- c) the estimated costs of the subcontracting are clearly identifiable in the estimated budget;
- d) any recourse to subcontracting, if not provided for in description of the action, is communicated by the beneficiary and approved by the Commission. The Commission may grant approval:
 - (i) before any recourse to subcontracting, if the beneficiaries requests an amendment

¹⁷ Directive 2014/24/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 February 2014 on public procurement and repealing Directive 2004/18/EC (OJ L 94, 28.3.2014, p. 65-242)

¹⁸ Directive 2014/25/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 February 2014 on procurement by entities operating in the water, energy, transport and postal services sectors and repealing Directive 2004/17/EC (OJ L 94, 28.3.2014, p. 243-374)

- (ii) after recourse to subcontracting if the subcontracting:
 - is specifically justified in the interim or final technical report and
 - does not entail changes to the grant agreement which would call into question the decision awarding the grant or be contrary to the equal treatment of applicants;
- e) the beneficiaries ensure that certain conditions applicable to beneficiaries, enumerated in the grant agreement (e.g. visibility, confidentiality, etc.), are also applicable to the subcontractors.

d) Financial support to third parties

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

12. PUBLICITY

12.1. By the beneficiaries

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 on all their publications, posters, programmes and other products as well as during related activities (conferences or seminars, and more.) realised under the co-financed project.

To do this they must use:

- the text: “With financial support from the European Union”
- the emblem available at https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/flag_en
- the following disclaimers:

For publications in print or electronic format:

'This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of <name of the author/partner> and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union'

For websites and social media accounts:

'This <website/account> was created and maintained with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of <name of the author/partner> and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union'

For videos and other audio-visual material:

'This <video/film/programme/recording> was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of <name of the author/partner > and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union'.

If this requirement is not fully complied with, the beneficiary's grant may be reduced in accordance with the provisions of the grant agreement.

In addition to the above obligations, the beneficiaries are invited to (optionally) update a [map on the Inforegio website](#) (by [submitting an entry](#) with examples of their actions).

12.2. By the Commission

With the exception of scholarships paid to natural persons and other direct support paid to natural persons in most need, 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.

The Commission will publish the following information:

- name of the beneficiary;
- address of the beneficiary when the latter is a legal person, region when the beneficiary is a natural person, as defined on NUTS 2 level¹⁹ if he/she is domiciled within the EU or equivalent if domiciled outside the EU;
- subject of the grant;
- amount awarded.

Upon a reasoned and duly substantiated request by the beneficiary, the publication shall be waived if such disclosure risks threatening the rights and freedoms of individuals concerned as protected by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union or harm the commercial interests of the beneficiaries.

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) No 2018/1725 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. 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 DG REGIO – Budget and Financial Management.

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 Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046²⁰. For more information see the Privacy Statement on:

https://ec.europa.eu/info/data-protection-public-procurement-procedures_en.

¹⁹ Commission Regulation (EC) No 105/2007 of 1 February 2007 amending the annexes to Regulation (EC) No 1059/2003 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of a common classification of territorial units for statistics (NUTS), OJ L39, 10.2.2007, p.1.

²⁰ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32018R1046>

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.

Applicants are requested to submit their applications by email **in pdf format** to the following email address:

REGIO-CALL-FOR-MEDIA@ec.europa.eu.

The date and time of receipt of the email with the application attached will constitute the evidence of submission.

Applications sent by post or by fax will not be accepted.

➤ **Contacts**

Any questions related to this call may be addressed to REGIO-CONTRACTS@ec.europa.eu. In order to ensure an efficient handling of any enquiry, please indicate clearly the reference of this call for proposals in the subject or in the text of the email.

The answers to the questions submitted will be published in the Q&A list at https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/newsroom/funding-opportunities/calls-for-proposal/ to ensure equal treatment of all potential applicants. Questions may be sent by applicants to the above address no later than 10 days before the deadline for the submission of proposals.

➤ **Annexes:**

- Application form
- Checklist of documents to be provided
- Model grant agreement

Appendix
Specific conditions for direct personnel costs

1. Calculation

The ways of calculating eligible direct personnel costs laid down in points (a) and (b) below are recommended and accepted as offering assurance as to the costs declared being actual.

The Commission may accept a different method of calculating personnel costs used by the beneficiary, if it considers that it offers an adequate level of assurance of the costs declared being actual.

a) for persons working exclusively on the action:

{monthly rate for the person

multiplied by

number of actual months worked on the action }

The months declared for these persons may not be declared for any other EU or Euratom grant.

The **monthly rate** is calculated as follows:

{annual personnel costs for the person

divided by 12 }

using the personnel costs for each full financial year covered by the reporting period concerned.

If a financial year is not closed at the end of the reporting period, the beneficiaries must use the monthly rate of the last closed financial year available;

b) for persons working part time on the action

(i) **If the person is assigned to the action at a fixed pro-rata of their working time:**

{monthly rate for the person multiplied by pro-rata assigned to the action

multiplied by

number of actual months worked on the action }

The working time pro-rata declared for these persons may not be declared for any other EU or Euratom grant.

The monthly rate is calculated as above.

(ii) In other cases:

{hourly rate for the person multiplied by number of actual hours worked on the action}

or

{daily rate for the person multiplied by number of actual days worked on the action}

(rounded up or down to the nearest half-day)

The number of actual hours/days declared for a person must be identifiable and verifiable.

The total number of hours/days declared in EU or Euratom grants, for a person for a year, cannot be higher than the annual productive hours/days used for the calculations of the hourly/daily rate. Therefore, the maximum number of hours/days that can be declared for the grant are:

{number of annual productive hours/days for the year (see below)}

minus

total number of hours and days declared by the beneficiary, for that person for that year, for other EU or Euratom grants}.

The '**hourly/daily rate**' is calculated as follows:

{annual personnel costs for the person

divided by

number of individual annual productive hours/days} using the personnel costs and the number of annual productive hours/days for each full financial year covered by the reporting period concerned.

If a financial year is not closed at the end of the reporting period, the beneficiaries must use the hourly/daily rate of the last closed financial year available.

The 'number of individual annual productive hours/days' is the total actual hours/days worked by the person in the year. It may not include holidays and other absences (such as sick leave, maternity leave, special leave, etc). However, it may include overtime and time spent in meetings, trainings and other similar activities.

2. Documentation to support personnel costs declared as actual costs

For **persons working exclusively on the action**, where the direct personnel costs are calculated following **point (a)**, there is no need to keep time records, if the beneficiary

signs a **declaration** confirming that the persons concerned have worked exclusively on the action.

For **persons assigned to the action at a fixed pro-rata of their working time**, where the direct personnel costs are calculated following **point (b)(i)**, there is no need to keep time records, if the beneficiary signs a declaration that the persons concerned have effectively worked at the fixed pro-rata on the action.

For **persons working part time on the action**, where direct personnel costs are calculated following **point (b)(ii)**, the beneficiaries must keep **time records** for the number of hours/days declared. The time records must be in writing and approved by the persons working on the action and their supervisors, at least monthly.

In the absence of reliable time records of the hours worked on the action, the Commission may accept alternative evidence supporting the number of hours/days declared, if it considers that it offers an adequate level of assurance.