



Questions & Answers

*Call for proposals VP/2019/017
Incubators (business support organisations)
for inclusive and social entrepreneurship*

1. Is there a possibility of this call deadline of 30/4/2020 being deferred due to Coronavirus crisis? From the call documents we have identified two dates - 30/04/2020 and 25/05/2020. What is the exact deadline for this call?

Given the current state of emergency due to the outbreak of COVID-19 and the disruptive impact on the operating capacity of several sectors in all countries, the submission deadline for the Call for proposals VP/2019/017 "Incubators (business support organisations) for inclusive and social entrepreneurship" has been extended to 25/05/2020.

The revised timetable for the Call for proposals has been published as Annex 1 on the call webpage.

2. Are entities registered in Switzerland, Georgia, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Armenia eligible to participate to this call?

As spelled out in section 6.1.a) of the call text, the entities eligible to participate in this call as single, lead applicant, co-applicants are entities which are properly established and registered in the following EaSI participating countries: all EU Member States (including UK under the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement), Iceland, Norway, Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey. Entities established in other countries are not eligible under this call for proposals.

Entities from Switzerland, Georgia, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Armenia, among others, are therefore not eligible to participate.

3. Do you plan to facilitate in any way the process of looking for partners for the call "Incubators (business support organisations) for inclusive and social entrepreneurship"? Is there any way to declare our interest to be a partner/member of consortia through the Commission website? Are there any links / connections / introductions that you may be able to offer?

Networks looking for partners, in view of submitting a joint proposal, can express their interest by returning to the Commission the form "Annex II", published on the call webpage. The Commission will post regularly an updated list of networks which have expressed interest (the same Annex II).

4. Are entities registered in Curacao eligible to participate to this call?

As spelled out in section 6.1.a) of the call text, the entities eligible to participate in this call as single, lead applicant, co-applicants are entities which are properly established and registered in the EaSI participating countries, which include all EU Member States. As Curacao is a country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands, entities from Curacao are eligible to participate, provided that they comply with all the eligibility criteria indicated in section 6.1.

5. Are you looking for only one winner proposal or multiple proposals could be awarded? Is it possible to know how much applications are expected?

As spelled out in section 6.1.a) of the call text, the Commission expects to fund one proposal. It is impossible to estimate the number of applications.

6. Is there a history of the number of applications that are usually submitted?

This call for proposals is a pilot call; there are no previous records on the number of applications submitted.

7. Could support organisations/social incubators form a network with members in 14 Member States and at least one EaSI participating countries to carry out the project or should the network already be established?

This call is aimed at mobilising existing networks. Therefore, according to the eligibility criteria, all applicants and co-applicants need to be already existing formal networks at the time of submission.

8. The call specifies that the applicant (or a consortium) needs to have members established in at least 14 EU Member States and in at least one non-EU EaSI participating country. It also says that the funded action is expected to mobilise as many individual member incubators of the network(s) as possible. Consequently, must all activities that will be proposed in the application necessarily be carried out in all the countries that the lead applicant or the co-applicant include in the application? Or can they be carried out in some of these countries ensuring, however, promotion, communication and diffusion activities in all the countries included in the application?

It is not obligatory that the project includes activities in all the countries covered by the applicant or the consortium. Different activities can have different geographic coverage. However, as referred to correctly in the question, to be relevant for this call, the project needs to have geographically balanced impact and mobilise a large number of incubators. This is respectively reflected in the award criteria: 1 and 3.

9. Can you please provide clarifications on one of the eligibility criteria spelled out in section 6.1.b) of the call text, namely:

To be eligible, the single, lead applicant, co-applicant and affiliated entity must be:

• **an established formal network of business incubators with its own legal personality or representing (as a joint secretariat or officially appointed coordinator) an established formal network. A consortium of several established networks is eligible.**

If the proposal is submitted by a single applicant, the entity must be a network of business incubators with its own legal personality or representing an established formal network.

The proposal can also be submitted by a consortium. In this case, **each member** of the consortium must be a network of business incubators with its own legal personality or representing an established formal network.

10. Can a single business incubator or an individual support organisation apply to the call as a co-applicant in partnership with one or two European networks? If yes, could a single business incubator anyway participate as an affiliated entity?

Single business incubators and individual support organisations are not eligible to apply under this call as applicants (lead or co-applicants). They cannot apply as affiliated entities either as affiliated entities must comply with the same eligibility criteria of the applicants. Business incubators and individual support organisations can only participate in this call through their representative networks.

11. Can you clarify in how many countries a network or a consortium of networks should have members to be eligible under this call?

If the proposal is submitted by only one formal network of business incubators, applying as single applicant, the network must have members in at least **14 EU Member States** and in **at least one non-EU EaSI participating country**.

If the proposal is submitted by a consortium of networks, the consortium as a whole (lead applicant and co-applicants jointly) must have established members in at least 14 EU Member States and in at least one non-EU EaSI participating country. Each member of the consortium does not necessarily be a multinational network.

12. Is it needed to list network members that will be involved in the specific actions (as affiliated entities) or can we avoid the specification at this stage? If we do not specify these organisations now, can we still consider some budget for the activities that will involve network members (for example peer to peer exchanges related costs)?

It is not necessary to detail in the proposal which incubators will participate in the events that will be organised to meet the objectives of this call. However, applicants can indicate the costs of these events in the estimated budget for the action. It is worth reminding that the networks' members cannot be considered as affiliated entities under this call (as mentioned in a previous reply, individual business incubators are not eligible to participate as affiliated entities or applicants).

13. As this call is for a single project for the entire European Union, is it possible that the beneficiary organisations can provide co-financing in kind, such as premises, technology or personnel?

The grant beneficiaries can provide their share of co-financing through different sources: it can be provided by own resources, income generated by the action, financial contribution by third parties. The beneficiaries can contribute to the action with their own resources by paying directly their staff costs and service providers. Please note however that contributions in kind (non-financial resources made available free of charge) are not accepted for the co-financing of the eligible costs.

14. We are a European Network which brings together non-profit entities throughout the European Union, where only some organisations manage incubators for social companies. Is it possible that we can participate in this call?

As spelled out in section 2.1. of the call text, "Network of business incubators" means an established network, which among its members includes organisations fulfilling the above definition of business incubator. Consequently the call is open also to networks which include multiple types of member organisations.

15. Could you please inform me if companies that are applying for this call are allowed to use a part of the grant amount to carry out its own social innovation project at same time? The idea is use its own social project as “business case” to support the other social companies.

The grant amount can only be used for activities necessary to achieve the objectives foreseen under this call for proposal and not for parallel individual projects. You can find a list of eligible activities in section 2.2.

16. Could you please inform if the applicants should write a proposal to answer this call in additional to the Form – “Description of the action and work plan”? If yes, how many pages does the proposal need to be and is there a template available?

The application comprises an application form including the budget, a description of the action and work plan plus a series of other required documents. Sections 16.1 and section 16.2 of the call text provide detailed instructions for the presentation of the application and the documents that must be provided. We recommend that applicants use the checklist available at pages 28, 29 and 30 in order to verify compliance with all requirements.

17. We would like to ask if international organisations, i.e. international public-sector organisations set up by international agreements as defined in Article 156 of the EC financial regulations, are eligible for the above call for proposals (as either applicant or co-applicant).

International organisations are not eligible to participate in this call for proposals.

18. Would it be possible to postpone the deadline for submitting applications by about 2 or 3 days as 21/05 is a holiday and it will be more difficult for post or courier companies to deliver the application before the current deadline?

As indicated in section 14 of the call text, the proposals must be **sent** by the applicants by the submission deadline and not received by the Commission. We recommend to keep evidence of posting or the express courier deposit slip as it could be requested in case of doubt regarding the date of submission.

Only hand-delivered proposals must be received by the European Commission by 4 p.m. of the submission date indicated in section 3 c) of the call text

19. Is the Turkish language accepted for project? Would you give an example of a draft of the paper that we will submit for the competition?

The proposals can be submitted only in one of the official languages of the EU. Therefore applications in Turkish will not be accepted. The template of the application form and the document for the description of the action are published on the call webpage.

20. Is the Call tailored to a specific partnership or open to the public?

This call for proposals is open to all partnerships that comply with the eligibility criteria spelled out in section 6 of the call text.

21. In the answer to question 9, you state that “in case a proposal is submitted by a consortium, each member of the consortium must be a network of business incubators with its own legal personality or representing an established formal network.” At the same time, in the answer to question 14 you mention that “the call is open also to networks which include multiple types of member organisations”. Can you please provide clarification on the following matter: how many business incubators (% out of the total member organisations) the single, lead applicant, co-applicant and/or affiliated entity must have within its network in order to comply with the criteria and be eligible for the call?

There is no specific target for the weight of business incubators in the network(s). However, the proposals will be assessed against the award criteria spelled out in section 9 of the call text. In particular, the third award criterion will look at the impact of the proposal and sustainability potential: the assessment will take into account, amongst others, the number of incubators targeted by the action and the extent to which the impact is likely to go beyond the network of incubators directly involved in the project (spill-over effect in the countries covered and to other countries). Please also note the following definition (Section 2.1): “Network of business incubators” means an established network, which among its members includes organisations fulfilling the above definition of business incubator. Consequently the call is open also to networks which include multiple types of member organisations.”

22. Does this call support only business incubators NGOs and networks or could our organisation apply for project including incubator idea?

This call for proposals supports networks of business incubators: the specific objectives, the types of actions and the expected results are described in section 2 of the call text.

23. Is it enough to become eligible by receiving legal letters/documents by at least two different incubators stating that this organisation is our representative in the context of this call for proposals?

To be eligible, the applicant must be a formally established network of business incubators. Therefore letters stating that the applicant is representing incubators in the context of this call, does not fulfil the criterion. The call addresses networks that already exist and have past experience from working as a network.

24. Does an organisation applying as lead applicant need to have at least 3 years of international project management experience or can the project coordinator be assigned among co-applicants?

As indicated in section 8.2 of the call text, three years of proven international project management activities is a requirement for the coordinator/lead applicant.

Please note that if the lead applicant for consortia is considered not to have the required operational capacity, the application as a whole will be rejected.

25. In case one organisation manages two different incubation centres in two different locations, but with a common legal personality, is this organisation still eligible to apply?

To ensure equal treatment of applicants, the Commission will not give a prior opinion on the eligibility of applicants, or affiliated entity(ies), or an action or specific activities.

However, as the call clearly explains it focus in paragraph 2.1., it “aims at mobilising existing network(s) of mainstream business incubators to expand their outreach to inclusive and social entrepreneurship”. One organisation with two incubation centres with a common legal personality cannot qualify as a network of business incubators and is therefore not eligible for this call.

26. Can a network which has no incubators as its direct members, but whose member organisations have incubators as their members, be considered as eligible within this call?

To ensure equal treatment of applicants, the Commission will not give a prior opinion on the eligibility of applicants, or affiliated entity(ies), or an action or specific activities.

As spelled out in section 6.1.b) of the call text, the call is addressed to established formal networks of business incubators. The call text also specifies that a network of business incubators means an established network, which among its members includes business incubators. A network which does not have business incubators among its own members does not qualify as a network of business incubators and is therefore not eligible for this call.

27. Would a consortium where only the lead applicant has members in over 14 EU member states and in over 1 non-EU EaSI participating country be eligible? Can the co-applicants be members of the lead applicant which have their own networks only at national level (regional and local)?

As indicated in section 6.1.b) of the call text, the consortium **as a whole** must have members in at least 14 EU Member States and in at least one non-EU EaSI participating country.

A consortium can therefore include both networks having members in at least 14 EU Member States and at least 1 non EU EaSI participating country and networks having members only at regional and local level.

28. We are a Social Innovation Cluster, where we have several organisations which are implementing incubation and acceleration activities. Are we eligible? Our legal form is an association.

To ensure equal treatment of applicants, the Commission will not give a prior opinion on the eligibility of applicants, or affiliated entity(ies), or an action or specific activities.

As spelled out in section 6.1.b) of the call text, the call is addressed to established formal networks of business incubators. And, as spelled out in section 2.1. of the call text, "Network of business incubators" means an established network, which among its members includes organisations fulfilling the above definition of business incubator. Consequently the call is open also to networks which include multiple types of member organisations.

29. Could you please inform if items 16, 17 and 18 (from the checklist) are mandatory for the application? What will happen if the applicant does not send this information?

Section "16.2. Required documents" of the Call informs that items 16, 17 and 18 do not need to be provided by public entities. However, these items are mandatory for applications from other entities.

The balance sheet and the profit and loss account and the summary sheet are documents required to assess the financial capacity of the applicants. As mentioned in the call text, only the proposals which fulfil the eligibility and selection criteria will be assessed against the award criteria.

As for the audit report, this is required for grants of EUR 750 000 or more per applicant or affiliated entity. If the audit report is not available AND a statutory audit report is not required by the Union or national law, a self-declaration signed by the applicant's authorized representative certifying the validity of its accounts for the last financial year available must be provided.

30. Due to the continuing Covid-19 crisis, is it possible that the submission date will be further extended?

The submission deadline has been already extended from 30/04 to 25/05. No further extension is foreseen.

31. Could you please clarify if the call is only for networks of conventional businesses or also for networks of social enterprises?

As spelled out in section 6.1.b) of the call text, the call is addressed to established formal networks of business incubators. The call text also specifies that a network of business incubators means an established network, which among its members includes business incubators. As mentioned in section 2.1. of the call text, the call aims at mobilising existing network(s) of business incubators to expand their outreach to inclusive and social entrepreneurship. To achieve this, the supported action shall draw from the experience of support organisations and networks already targeting social entrepreneurs and (potential) entrepreneurs from underrepresented groups.

32. Do we need a legal entity to apply? In case we do not manage to found our legal entity until the application deadline, can we also apply as a single person with the intention to found the respective company and submit the name and data of the legal entity later?

This call is open only for legal entities. The application must be submitted by a legal entity complying with the eligibility criteria spelled out in section 6 of the call text.

33. Have you published a successful application that EU funds have been granted to at another, yet similar, program before?

There have been no similar programs in the past. This call is piloting a new approach.

34. Is it enough to digitally upload all requested data until May 25th, 2020, or do you need physical copies of these documents until that date too?

Please see Section 14 of the call text: applicants must submit the application form both electronically and in hard copy by the deadline of May 25th.

35. Can a Tunisian incubator participate in the project as a co-applicant?

As spelled out in section 6.1.a) of the call text, the entities eligible to participate in this call as single, lead applicant, co-applicants are entities which are properly established and registered in the following EaSI participating countries: all EU Member States (including UK under the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement), Iceland, Norway, Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey. Entities established in other countries are not eligible under this call for proposals.

Entities from Tunisia, among others, are therefore not eligible to participate.

36. How do you understand the term incubator?

As spelled out in section 2.1. of the call text, business incubators mean support organisations of which the main purpose is to promote business creation and entrepreneurship by offering relevant services such as training, workshops, business coaching and mentoring, business advice, networking opportunities and financing for potential start-up companies and micro entrepreneurs. These bodies can support the start-up as well as the scale-up of businesses.

37. Can an incubator from one European country apply as the lead (and without any other companies)?

As spelled out in section 6.1.b) of the call text, the call is addressed to established formal networks of business incubators and not to single incubators.

38. Can member organisations of the applicants' networks (lead applicant/ co-applicant) implement parts of the project activities and

thus get funding from the grant accordingly? Is it correct that affiliated entities can receive funding? We understand that “associated organisations” does not refer to members of the network and that associated organisations cannot receive funding, is that correct?

Member organisations can implement part of the action and have their costs covered by the grant only if they participate as (co)applicants or as affiliated entities to the applicant and provided that they comply with the eligibility criteria. Please bear in mind that also affiliated entities must comply with the same eligibility criteria as the (co)applicants.

Associate organisations are indeed organisations that participate in the action on a no-cost basis and therefore they cannot receive funding.

39. Regarding the Key issues paper, could you please confirm that one paper per each applicant and co-applicant is required?

As spelled out in section 2.2 of the call text, the Key Issues paper will be taken into consideration when the applications are assessed against the award criteria. This implies that the Key Issues paper is used to assess the applications and not the individual (co-)applicants, so only one Key Issues paper is needed.

40. Are the costs of in-house consultants working under a contract with the applicant or co-applicants eligible? Are those incurred by members of the applicant and co-applicants networks (i.e. incubators’ staff) eligible?

The Financial Guidelines specify that the costs of natural persons working under a contract with the beneficiary other than an employment contract (e.g. in-house consultants) may be assimilated to cost of personnel under an employment contract and therefore may be eligible, provided that the following conditions are fulfilled:

- 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);
- the result of the work belongs to the beneficiary (unless exceptionally agreed otherwise); and
- the costs are not significantly different from the costs of staff performing similar tasks under an employment contract with the beneficiary.

However, the cost of in-house consultants working under a contract with the members of the applicants and co-applicants are not eligible. Only costs incurred by the co(applicants) and affiliated entities can be considered eligible.

41. According to the Financial Guidelines, “Costs of travel and related subsistence allowances may also include expenses for participants from organisations other than the beneficiaries or affiliated entities where applicable (e.g. for attendance of a conference)”. Is there a maximum percentage of costs to be incurred under this budget line by organizations other than the beneficiaries or affiliated entities?

In general, travels of participants from organisations other than the beneficiaries or affiliated entities can be accepted provided that they contribute to the realization of the action and the objectives of the call. The beneficiary must clearly answer questions such as: why is the participation of the members relevant for the scope of the action? There is no maximum percentage.

42. Are the costs of services of social organizations working with social entrepreneurs and others focused on target groups that are under-represented in entrepreneurship, and those of members of the applicant organizations most advanced in social and inclusive entrepreneurship support, eligible when incurred in order to train the others on advanced experiences and methodologies to support social and inclusive entrepreneurship, as well as to organize specific events in this regard during the project? Is there a maximum percentage of costs for the subcontracting?

The applicant organisations should have all the necessary skills to carry out the action. However, where justified and necessary, specific tasks that are part of the action (except the core tasks defined in the call document) may be executed by a third organisation by means of a contract between one or more of the beneficiaries and a subcontractor. The tasks to be subcontracted and the reasons for doing so must be clearly specified in the description of the action and clearly identified in the budget in separate lines. The award of such contracts will be subject to the procedures indicated under “Main procurement rules for the award of implementing contracts and subcontracting” in the Financial Guidelines.

43. Also regarding the costs of services or subcontracting, should costs related to the External Advisory Board’s Members (travels, accommodation, etc.) be charged under subcontracting too? Could its members be paid for taking part of the Committee? On the other hand, are costs of subcontracting expert activities (studies, training, etc.) to an organization taking part of the External Advisory Board of the project eligible, or would this imply a conflict of interest?

Only costs that have a specific link to the action and are necessary for its implementation can be considered direct eligible costs. This direct link does not seem compatible with the function of an external advisory board. Service contracts must be awarded to the tender offering the best value for money, meaning the best price-quality ratio or, as appropriate, to the tender offering the lowest price. In doing so, any possible situation where a conflict of interests may arise should indeed be avoided.

44. Could you please confirm that the provisions of section 7 of the Financial Guidelines apply to this specific call for proposals and that two advanced payments will be foreseen?

Yes, for projects of an indicative duration between 12 and 24 months, two pre-financing payments and one balance payment are foreseen as indicated in section 7 of the Financial Guidelines that are applicable to this call for proposals.

45. Is a financial guarantee required for this project once awarded and for what amount?

A financial guarantee may be required in case of weak financial capacity of one of the applicants. The financial guarantee is one of the mitigation measures possible in case one or several co-applicants do not reach the financial ratio published in the call and are considered as being financially weak. In such case, a financial guarantee may be requested for the amount of the pre-financing payment. Other mitigation measures are possible such as a joint and several liability or reduced pre financing are possible and decided on a case-by-case basis.

46. Given the difficulty in obtaining signatures in blue ink in the current context, is it possible to include digital signatures (with digital certificate)/scanned signatures for the documents where an original signature is required?

In the context of the Coronavirus crisis, if submitted on time, scanned signed copies can be accepted as a temporary measure, but the original copies must be submitted with the original blue ink signature as soon as possible, notably before the end of the evaluation process.

47. When the co-financing of the applicant and the co-applicants (20% of their total budget allocation for the project) is provided in the form of the beneficiaries' own resources (human resources) but not in terms of financial contributions, can the information on the financial contribution in the letter of commitment be deleted?

If the co-applicants do not provide a financial contribution and participate in the action with their own resources, the reference to the financial contribution can be deleted in the letter of commitment. The roles and tasks of their participation should however be detailed.

48. What proof shall applicants provide to demonstrate that they fulfil the requirement regarding the criteria to represent members from at least 14 EU member states and at least one other non-EU country?

Applicants can list their members from the 15 countries and attach the list as an annex in the "Supplementary space for additional documents" of the SWIM application.

49. Is it possible to include a co-applicant (e.g. a private company/entity) to the bid, which shall serve as the main coordinator of the actions, if the co-applicant is also a member of the lead applicant organisation?

The coordination role must be performed by the lead applicant; a co-applicant cannot act as coordinator. Provided that this is ensured and that the eligibility criteria are met (in particular being an established formal network of business incubators), a member of the lead applicant can be a co-applicant in the consortium.

50. What kind of document are you exactly expecting from us under point 9 of the checklist?

The statute of a company is the act that governs the internal life and functioning of the company. It is normally embedded in the founding act of the company. The German word is *Satzung*.