



Applicants Manual

for the 3rd Call for Proposal

PART 4: APPLICATION AND ASSESSMENT

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I. Overview

The 3rd call for proposals of the Danube Transnational Programme is organised in two relevant steps:

- *“First Step”* - the Expression of Interest (EoI) outlining mainly the intervention logic of the proposal and the strategic relevance for the DTP, submitted through the eMS
- *“Second Step”* - the full Application Form (AF), submitted together with the required annexes through the eMS

Only proposals pre-selected in the first step will be invited to submit the full Application Form (with its required annexes) in the second step.

The Expression of Interest and the Application Form shall be filled in on the eMS Monitoring and Information System. Guidelines with detailed technical information for the use of the system will constitute annex to this manual and will be available before the opening of the second step.

This part illustrates clearly and transparently the project selection system. This system is made public in order to make all stakeholders and project partners aware of the selection procedures and criteria before preparing their applications. Hence, they can develop high quality proposals and assist the programme to reach its specific objectives of realising high quality, result-oriented transnational projects relevant to the programme area.

II. First step

II.1. Application procedure

In the first step, applicants are requested to submit an EoI based on a reduced level of information compared to the Application Form.

The EoI presents mainly the intervention logic and the strategic relevance of the proposal in terms of contribution to the programme SOs in line with relevant restrictions, where applicable (e.g. SO 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 3.1), transnational character and impact, partnership and budget.

Once filled in completely and accurately, the EoI can be submitted through the eMS system. No additional documents will be accepted and/or considered. Only electronic submission is allowed. After the submission, no changes are possible. In case of multiple submissions only the last version will be considered.

Once the deadline for submission has expired, the assessment of the EoI is carried out by the JS. The assessment results are then presented to the MC who decides which project proposal is to be invited to develop and submit a full application.

In very limited and specific cases, the applicants may be provided with recommendations on their proposal (e.g. extending the partnership, merging with other project proposals, improving

the intervention logic etc.). Applicants are informed about the result of the assessment through electronic communication.

Please note: The programme recommends that at the time of the EoI submission the project proposals are already at an advanced stage of development: project partners involved and the overall structure well defined. Only project proposals matching a certain readiness, quality level and responding to the selection criteria can be invited to enter the 2nd step of the application procedure.

ATTENTION: The LP and the main characteristics of the intervention logic cannot be modified between the two steps, but only improved (especially if it is recommended by the Programme), keeping the scope of the main objective and the result.

II.2. Assessment procedure

In course of the selection process, two different sets of criteria are applied to come to the decision of approving an application:

- The eligibility criteria
- The quality criteria

The eligibility check aims at confirming that the proposal has arrived within the set deadline, that the Expression of Interest is complete and conforms to the requirements and that the partnership and the projects fulfils the criteria established at programme level. This check will be carried out by the JS, supported by the NCPs for the verification of the eligibility of the Lead Applicant, and the decision is taken by the MC. **Failure to meet the eligibility requirements leads to the rejection of the proposal.** Eligibility criteria are of “knock-out nature” and should be clearly answered with a YES or NO as to a large extent they are not subject to interpretation.

No	Eligibility criteria	Description
1	The EoI has been submitted within the set deadline (date and time)	The EoI has been submitted within the date and time set in the call announcement.
2	The EoI has been submitted through the eMS	The EoI has been submitted through eMS monitoring system of the programme.
3	The EoI is compiled in English	All parts of the EoI are compiled in English, as the official language of the DTP.
4	Partnership is composed by at	Partnership complies with the minimum requirement

	least three financing partners from at least three participating countries of which at least one is located in a Member State	for a transnational DTP partnership: at least three financing partners (receiving ERDF, IPA or ENI co-financing) from at least three participating countries, of which at least one, the LP, is located in a Member State.
5	Lead Applicants is an eligible beneficiary	The Lead Applicant fulfils the requirement set in Part 2, section II of this manual.
6	The proposal has selected at least two programme output indicators in connection to the outputs defined by the applicant	The proposal has selected the horizontal output indicator and at least another programme output indicator in connection to the outputs defined by the applicant.

The quality check forms the basis for an assessment of the EoI with the aim of bringing the projects into a certain ranking for selection.

Each question is assessed on basis of sub-criteria with each being scored from 0 (not present / missing) to 5 (very good):

Score	Description
0 None	The information requested is missing (either not filled it in or not provided in the text). The information is provided but reflects the inexistence of a requirement.
1 Very poor	The information provided is considered as not relevant or inadequate
2 Poor	The information provided lacks relevant quality and contains strong weaknesses
3 Fair	The overall information provided is adequate, however some aspects are not clearly or sufficiently detailed
4 Good	The information provided is adequate with sufficiently outlined details
5 Very Good	The information provided is outstanding in its details, clearness and coherence

Assessment main questions	Points
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<i>To what extent is the proposal in line with the focus of the programme and call?</i>	Max. 5 points
<i>To what extent is the project intervention logic coherent and in line with the programme one?</i>	Max. 5 points
<i>To what extent does the project have clear transnational dimension and impact?</i>	Max. 5 points
<i>To what extent is the partnership composition relevant, justified and balanced for the proposed project?</i>	Max. 5 points
<i>To what extent is the budget coherent with the planned activities and involved partners?</i>	Max. 5 points
Total	Max. 25 points

The overall score will be calculated as an average of the individual scores of each question.

Project proposals receiving a minimum 75% will be recommended by the JS for immediate selection.

Project proposals receiving between 60% and 74% will need further discussions and a final decision will be taken by the MC.

Project proposals receiving less than 60% will be recommended by the JS for rejection.

Applicants will be informed about the results of the assessment within 10 days from the official approval of the assessment from the Monitoring Committee.

III. Second step

III.1. Application procedure

After the selection of the projects to be invited in the second step by the Monitoring Committee, the JS will inform the Lead Applicants about the approval (with or without recommendations) or the rejection or their proposal.

Projects invited to the second step will have to submit a full Application Form that contains detailed information on the partnership, background situation and challenges, target groups, sustainability and durability, work packages and activities and budget. The detailed application procedure will be communicated by the MA/ JS to the projects invited in the second step.

III.2. Assessment procedure

The aim of the “Second Step” is to allow the Programme bodies to in depth understand the details of the project proposals that have been considered most promising after the assessment of the EoIs.

In course of the selection process, during the “Second step”, two different sets of criteria are applied to come to the decision of approving an application: the eligibility criteria and the quality criteria.

The **eligibility criteria** aim at confirming to the applicants that their proposal has arrived within the set deadline and that the Application Form is complete and conform to the requirements. As the eligibility criteria are of “knock-out nature”, they should be clearly answered with a YES or NO as to a large extent they are not subject to interpretation.

This phase will be carried out by the JS, assisted by the NCPs.

The failure to meet the eligibility requirements leads to the rejection of the proposal or to the rejection of the partner whose eligibility problem is related to.

The following table lists all eligibility criteria whose consequence on failure results in failing the whole proposal:

No	Eligibility criteria	Description
1	The AF has been submitted within the set deadline (date and time)	The AF has been submitted within the date and time set in the call announcement.
2	The AF has been submitted through the eMS monitoring system	The AF has been submitted through the official eMS monitoring system.
3	The AF is compiled in English	All parts of the AF are compiled in English, as the official language of the DTP.

4	Partnership is composed by at least three financing partners from at least three participating countries of which at least one (LP) is located in a Member State	Partnership complies with the minimum requirement for a transnational DTP partnership: at least three financing partners (receiving ERDF, IPA or ENI co-financing) from at least three participating countries, of which at least one (LP) is located in a Member State.
5	Lead Applicant is an eligible beneficiary	The Lead Applicant fulfils the requirement set in Part 2, section II of the Applicants Manual.
6	At least 3 joint cooperation levels are indicated	According to Art 12(4) of EU reg. 1299/2013, among the four levels of cooperation (joint development, joint implementation, joint staffing and joint financing) beneficiaries shall cooperate in the development and implementation of projects and in either the staffing or the financing of projects, or in both.
7	The main characteristics of the project intervention logic in the AF have not been modified compared to the one outlined in the EoI	The scope of the project main objective, specific objectives, result, outputs as outlined in the EoI are not modified in the AF.
8	The Lead Partner in the AF has not been changed compared to the one in the EoI	The institution of the Lead Partner in the AF is the same as the one applying in the EoI. Administrative changes are not considered a change under this criterion.
9	Changes of partners between the EoI and the AF respected the threshold ¹	Changes (replacement and/ or withdrawal) of directly financed partners do not exceed the threshold of maximum 4 partners
10	Completeness of Partnership Agreement	The Partnership Agreement is complete and signed by all directly financed partners.

The following table lists all eligibility criteria whose consequence on failure results in failing the single partners affected.

No	Eligibility criteria	Description
11	Financed partners (ERDF/IPA/ENI) are eligible	The ERDF/IPA/ENI financed partner fulfils the requirement set in Part 2, section II of the Applicants Manual.
12	Completeness of submitted ERDF/IPA/ENI partner documents	The documents (Declaration of co-financing, State Aid declaration, Declaration for International organisations) are filled in and signed by the partner.
13	Completeness of submitted ASP documents	The document (ASP declaration) is filled in and signed by the ASP.

¹ The changes refer to replacement or withdrawal of partners, while adding partners is permitted without limitation

In case of missing documents, parts of documents and/or signatures, the LA will be awarded 5 working days from the **JS notification** for the completion of the documents.

The purpose of the other set of criteria, the **quality criteria**, is to assess the quality of the eligible project proposals. Quality criteria are closely linked to the specific objectives and results of the DTP CP and are common to all Priority Axes.

This phase will be carried out by the JS, supported by external assessors. The assessment is based on an assessment matrix with the following criteria groups:

- Strategic assessment criteria - The main aim is to determine the extent of project's contribution to the achievement of programme objectives (contribution to programme results).
- Operational assessment criteria - The main aim is to assess the viability and the feasibility of the proposed project, as well as its value for money in terms of resources used versus results delivered.

Each criteria group ("Strategic" and "Operational") is assessed on basis of sub-criteria with each being scored from 0 (not present / missing) to 5 (very good). The score of the main question is an average of the scores of the related guiding questions.

Score		Description
0	None	The information requested is missing (either not filled it in or not provided in the text). The information is provided but reflects the inexistence of a requirement.
1	Very poor	The information provided is considered as not relevant or inadequate
2	Poor	The information provided lacks relevant quality and contains strong weaknesses
3	Fair	The overall information provided is adequate, however some aspects are not clearly or sufficiently detailed
4	Good	The information provided is adequate with sufficiently outlined details
5	Very Good	The information provided is outstanding in its details, clearness and coherence

To determine if the project is strategic for the programme and in line with the provisions set in the call announcement, the *strategic assessment* is carried out first and independently from the *operational assessment*. Only projects successfully passing the *strategic assessment* are assessed operationally. **The knock-out threshold for the assessment is set at 60%.**

The following procedure applies:

- If a proposal receives a lower score than 60% in the strategic assessment, then it will not be assessed operationally and it fails the overall assessment.

- If a proposal receives at least 60% both in the strategic assessment, then it will be assessed also from an operational point of view and the final score will be given by the sum of the scores related to the strategic and operational assessment, taking into consideration the weight that each criterion provides to the overall points (strategic 30/50 = 60% of the total score, operational 20/50 = 40% of the total score²).

In the following tables the sub-criteria to assess the strategic and operational aspects are illustrated. The sub-criteria are defined using a set of questions with the scope of guiding the assessor through, while performing his/ her evaluation. Due to the complex requirements of transnational projects, these questions cannot be answered in a yes or no manner. The assessor must check to what extent the questions are satisfactorily answered by the applicant and then give an overall assessment score. Guiding questions should be considered binding, as it is binding also the maximum score that can be attributed to single guiding questions.

The criteria for the quality check will contain:

- Five sub-criteria for the strategic relevance for a maximum score of 30 points.
- Four sub-criteria for the organisational relevance for a maximum score of 20 points.

A. Strategic relevance

Assessment main questions	Guiding questions	Points
<i>Are the territorial needs and challenges identified and duly justified?</i>	To what extent are the territorial needs/ challenges coherently described and relevant for achieving the programme objectives?	Max. 5 points
	To what extent is the proposal clearly addressing the needs/ challenges?	
	To what extent does the proposal take into consideration the capitalisation of relevant previous projects and the synergies with on-going projects and brings added value to them?	
<i>Is the intervention logic coherent?</i>	To what extent is the project intervention logic coherent with the programme one?	Max. 5 points
	To what extent is the project intervention logic coherent and well defined in terms of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ definition of the main and specific objectives, 	

² The score is calculated by multiplying the single points received by each assessment group to its weight and summing the result of each assessment group: For example if a project received 63% in strategic and 59% in operational the final score is calculated as follows: $63 \times 0.6 + 59 \times 0.4 = 37.8 + 23.6 = 61\%$

	<p>expected result and outputs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ link between the main and specific objectives, expected result and outputs ➤ link between the needs of the target groups and the proposed outputs and result 	
	To what extent the envisaged activities can realistically reach the planned result?	
<i>To which extent the proposal contributes to an EU strategy or policy?</i>	<p>To what extent is the project concretely contributing to a relevant EU strategy/ policy (other than EUSDR) in the thematic field addressed by the project?</p> <p>To what extent does the project clearly contribute to one or more targets of the selected EUSDR Priority Area(s), as set out by the Priority Areas?</p> <p>To what extent is the EUSDR embedded in the proposal (at the level of needs and challenges, methodology, synergy/ capitalisation, work plan, durability and transferability)?</p>	Max. 5 points
<i>Is the partnership composition relevant, justified and balanced for the proposed project?</i>	<p>To what extent is the partnership representing the right mix of countries and competences according to the project topic, its geographic focus if relevant, and the proposed outputs and result?</p> <p>To what extent is the role of the partners balanced and relevant for achieving the main objective?</p> <p>To what extent do the partners demonstrate that their participation in the project is benefitting the territory they represent?</p>	Max 5 points
<i>Is the need for transnational cooperation demonstrated?</i>	<p>To what extent does the project have a clear transnational dimension/ impact?</p> <p>To what extent is the added value of the transnational cooperation clearly described?</p>	Max. 5 points
<i>Is the target group defined and has ownership of the project results?</i>	<p>To what extent is the target group clearly identified and involved throughout the project implementation?</p> <p>To what extent does the proposal clearly explain how the target group will integrate/use the project outputs?</p> <p>To what extent are the durability and transferability of the outputs clearly ensured?</p> <p>To what extent does the project prove to make a positive</p>	Max. 5 points

	contribution to the programme's horizontal principles?	
	Total	Max. 30 points

B. Operational relevance

Assessment main questions	Guiding questions	Points
<i>Is the work plan realistic, consistent and coherent?</i>	To what extent are the proposed timetable and spending forecast coherent and realistic?	Max. 5 points
	To what extent are the planned activities, outputs, deliverables and result coherent with the overall methodology?	
	To what extent are the activities logically linked, described in detail (how, where, when and by whom they will be undertaken) and balanced in terms of geographical implementation (national, regional, local)?	
<i>To what extent are management structures and procedures in line with the project size, duration and needs?</i>	To what extent are the management structures (e.g. project steering committee) and procedures (e.g. internal procedures, quality assurance etc.) clear, transparent, efficient and effective?	Max. 5 points
	To what extent does the partnership ensure proper dissemination of information and knowledge transfer between the partners?	
	To what extent does the lead applicant demonstrate its capacity to manage EU co-financed projects or other international projects or can ensure adequate measures for management support?	
<i>To what extent are communication activities appropriate and forceful to reach the relevant target groups and stakeholders?</i>	To what extent are the communication objectives clearly linked to the project specific objectives?	Max. 5 points
	To what extent are the chosen approach and/ or tactics appropriate to reach the communication objectives?	
	To what extent are communication activities and deliverables appropriate to reach the relevant target groups and stakeholders?	
<i>Does the project budget demonstrate</i>	To what extent is the budget allocated to each content related activity justified and correctly quantified?	Max. 5 points

<i>value for money?</i>	To what extent is the budget of each BL coherent with the planned activities and involved partners?	
	To what extent is the budget allocated to project management and communication appropriate and justified?	
Total		Max. 20 points

The overall score will be calculated as an average of the score related to the strategic relevance and operational relevance, taking into consideration the points that each criterion provides to the overall points.

Project proposals receiving a minimum 75% of the score between the strategic and operational relevance will be recommended by the JS for immediate selection.

Project proposals receiving between 60% and 74% of the score between the strategic and operational relevance will need further discussions and a final decision will be taken by the MC.

Project proposals receiving less than 60% of the score between the strategic and operational relevance will be recommended by the JS for rejection.

IV. Complaint procedure

All rules set in this manual are meant to provide transparent information to all applicants who are applying for a financial support from the Danube Transnational Programme. Specifically, assessment and selection procedures set in this manual offer a fair and transparent consideration of all received proposals.

The rules set in this section are aimed at providing a transparent complaint procedure against decisions taken by Programme authorities during the project assessment and selection process³.

The complaint against a decision of the Managing or Certifying Authority of the Programme during project implementation based on the subsidy contract concluded between the Managing Authority and the Lead Partner follows the rules laid down in the subsidy contract.

1. The Lead Applicant is the only one entitled to file a complaint.

³ In case of appeal to the judiciary system against the decision of the programme authorities during the project assessment and selection process, the court of Hungary has the jurisdiction on the matter.

2. The right to complain against a decision regarding the project selection applies to the Lead Applicant whose project application was not selected for the Programme co-financing during the project assessment and selection process.
3. The complaint is to be lodged against the communication issued by the Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat based on the decision by the Monitoring Committee as the MA/JS' communication is the only legally binding act towards the Lead Applicant during the project assessment and selection process.
4. The complaint can be lodged only against the outcomes of the eligibility assessment performed by the JS, supported by the NCP and approved by the MC.
5. The complaint should be lodged in writing by e-mail to the Managing Authority of the Programme within 5 calendar days after the Lead Applicant had been officially notified by the MA/JS about the results of the project selection process. The complaint should include:
 - a. Name and address of the Lead Applicant
 - b. Reference number and acronym of the application which is a subject of the complaint
 - c. Clearly indicated reasons for the complaint, including listing of all elements of the assessment which are being complaint and/or failures in adherence with procedures limited to those criteria mentioned in point 4
 - d. (e-)signature of the legal representative of the Lead Applicant (scanned signatures are accepted)
 - e. Any supporting documents (no additional content-related information than the one included in the proposal is allowed)
6. The relevant documentation shall be provided for the sole purpose of supporting the complaint. No other grounds for the complaint than indicated in point 4 will be taken into account during the complaint procedure.
7. A complaint will be rejected without further examination if submitted after the set deadline or if the formal requirements set in point 5 are not observed.
8. In case the complaint is rejected under provisions set in point 7, the MA/JS conveys this information within 10 working days to the Lead Applicant and informs the Monitoring Committee.
9. Within 5 working days after the receipt of the complaint the MA/JS confirms to the Lead Applicant in writing having received the complaint and notifies the Monitoring Committee.
10. The Managing Authority, assisted by the Joint Secretariat, examines the complaint and prepares its technical examination regarding the merit of the complaint.

11. The complaint will then be examined on the basis of the information brought forward by the Lead Applicant in the complaint and the technical examination prepared by the MA/JS by the Complaint Panel.
12. The Complaint Panel is the only body entitled to review a complaint against a decision regarding assessment and selection of projects co-financed by the Programme.
13. The Complaint Panel comprises of 3 members of whom one is the Chair of the Monitoring Committee, one is member of the Monitoring Committee and the third one is member of the Managing Authority or Joint Secretariat (not involved in the assessment).
14. The members of the Complaint Panel are appointed by the Monitoring Committee.
15. Impartiality of members of the Complaint Panel towards the case under review has to be ensured. If this cannot be provided, the distinct member shall refrain from the distinct case's review and be replaced by another impartial member.
16. The Joint Secretariat acts as the secretariat for the Complaint Panel and provides any assistance necessary for the review of the complaint.
17. The Managing Authority shall provide the Members of the Complaint Panel no later than 10 working days after the receipt of the complaint with a copy of:
 - a. The complaint with the technical examination by the Managing Authority and Joint Secretariat
 - b. The original application and all supporting documents that were taken into consideration by the relevant bodies during the project assessment and selection process
 - c. All documents relating to the assessment of the application in question including checklists and the record of the Monitoring Committee's decision
 - d. Any other document requested by the Members of the Complaint Panel relevant to the complaint
18. The Complaint Panel will have 5 working days to provide a binding decision through written procedure.
19. The decision if the complaint is justified or to be rejected is taken by the Complaint Panel by consensus. In case it is justified, the case will be sent back to the Monitoring Committee to review the project application and its assessment. The Complaint Panel has to provide the Monitoring Committee with a written justification with explicit reference to the criteria established in the Complaint Procedure
20. The decision of the Complaint Panel is communicated by the MA/JS in writing to the Lead Applicant and the Monitoring Committee within 5 working days from the receipt of the Complaint Panel decision.

21. The complaint procedure, from the receipt of the complaint to the communication of the Complaint Panel's decision to the Lead Applicant, should be resolved within maximum 30 calendar days.
22. The decision of the Complaint Panel is final, binding to all parties and not subject of any further complaint proceedings within the Programme based on the same grounds.

Proposals rejected after the quality assessment will receive an official electronic communication from the programme with the reasons for rejection outlined in a summarised grid. Further details on the reasons for rejection can be requested on demand and, according to the needs, could be discussed in bilateral meetings.