



Applicants Manual

for the period 2014-2020

Version 1

PART 5: APPLICATION AND ASSESSMENT

edited by the Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat
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Disclaimer

This document was endorsed by the Danube Programming Committee on 14th August 2015. However, please note that it is still subject to final approval by the Monitoring Committee to be established within three months of the date of notification of the European Commission decision adopting the Cooperation Programme.

PART 5: APPLICATION and ASSESSMENT

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I. Overview

The call for proposal of the Danube Transnational Programme is organised in two relevant steps:

- “*First Step*” with the Expression of Interest (EoI) outlining mainly the intervention logic of the proposal and the strategic relevance for the DTP submitted through the programme website
- “*Second Step*” with the submission of the completed Application Form (AF) with the required annexes through the programme monitoring system

Only proposals pre-selected in the first step can submit the completed Application Form (with its required annexes) in the second step.

The Application Form will be filled in on the Front Office of the IMIS 2014-2020 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. A simplified operational part that includes the budget and the work plan is also described but its details in this phase are reduced compared to the complete Application Form.

Once filled in completely and accurately, the EoI can be uploaded onto the dedicated section of the programme website. No additional documents will be accepted and/or considered. Only electronic submission is allowed and only the first version submitted will be taken into account. Any further version of the same project proposal will not be considered as valid and will not be assessed. Once the e-version of the document is submitted no changes are possible.

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 EoI is to be invited to submit a full application.

In very limited and specific cases, the applicants are provided with recommendations on their proposal (e.g. extending the partnership, merging with other project proposals, etc.). Applicants are informed about the result of the assessment through electronic communication.

Please note: The programme recommends that project proposals are already at an advanced stage on EoI submission: 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 intervention logic cannot be changed between the first and second step.

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.

Nr	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 official DTP website	The EoI has been submitted through the specific section of the official DTP website.
3	The EoI is compiled in	All parts of the EoI are compiled in English, as

	English	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 is located in a Member State	Partnership complies with the minimum requirement for a transnational DTP partnership: at least three financing partners (receiving ERDF or IPA co-financing) from at least three participating countries, of which at least one is located in a Member State.
5	Lead Partner is an eligible beneficiary	The Lead Applicant fulfils the requirement set in Part 2, section II of this manual.
6	The proposal contributes to the programme objectives/mission and the programme priorities.	The proposal clearly addresses the Programme mission. It clearly focuses on and contributes to the selected priority.
7	The proposal contributes to at least two programme output indicators	The proposal contributes to the horizontal output indicator predefined in the EoI and to at least another programme output indicator.

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. Quality assessment criteria are divided in two categories:

- 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):

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 assure project results relevance for the programme, the strategic assessment is carried out first and independently of the operational assessment. Only projects that are successful at the strategic assessment stage are assessed also from the operational point of view. The knock-out threshold for the strategic relevance is set at 60%. If proposals receive a lower score, then they won't be checked for the operational relevance and fail the overall assessment.

The criteria for the quality check will contain:

- Six sub-criteria for the strategic relevance for a maximum score of 30 points
- Two sub-criteria for the operational relevance for a maximum score of 10 points

A. Strategic relevance

Assessment main questions	Guiding questions	Points
<i>Are the territorial needs and challenges identified and duly justified?</i>	Are the territorial needs/ challenges coherently described?	5 points
	Is the proposal clearly addressing the needs/ challenges?	
	Are the described needs/ challenges relevant for achieving the programme objectives?	
<i>Is the intervention logic coherent?</i>	Is the project intervention logic coherent with the programme one?	5 points
	Is the project main objective clearly contributing to achieving the selected programme specific objective?	
	Are the envisaged activities expected to reach the planned result?	
<i>To which extent the proposal contributes to an EU strategy or policy?</i>	Is the project concretely contributing to a programme relevant EU strategy/ policy (other than EUSDR) in the thematic field addressed by the project?	5 points
	Does the project clearly contribute to one or more Priority Areas as set out in the Action Plan of the EUSDR?	
	Does the project provide clear value added regarding the achievement of actions and/or targets defined for one or more EUSDR Priority Areas?	
<i>Is the partnership composition relevant, justified and balanced for the proposed project?</i>	Is the partnership representing the right mix of countries and competences according to the project topic?	5 points
	Is the partnership balanced and not overly dominated by one country?	
	Is the Lead Applicant experienced and competent to lead the partnership?	
<i>Is the need for transnational cooperation demonstrated?</i>	Does the project have a clear transnational dimension/impact?	5 points
	Is the added value of the transnational cooperation clearly described?	
<i>Is the target group defined and has</i>	Is the target group clearly identified?	5 points
	Does the proposal clearly explain how the target group will	

<i>ownership of the project results?</i>	integrate/use the project results?	
	Are the durability and transferability of its results clearly ensured?	
Total		30 points

B. Operational relevance

Assessment main questions	Guiding questions	Points
<i>Is the work plan realistic, consistent and coherent?</i>	Is the proposed timetable coherent and realistic?	5 points
	Are the planned activities realistic and coherent with the overall methodology?	
	Is the work plan well-structured and mature?	
<i>Does the project budget demonstrate value for money?</i>	Is the overall requested amount coherent with the proposed activities, outputs and partnership?	5 points
	Is the budget of each WP coherent with the planned activities and involved partners?	
Total		10 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 (strategic relevance 30/40 = 75% of the total score, operational relevance 10/40 = 25% of the total score).

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.

The final decision will be taken by the MC and might take into consideration the number of projects contributing to each output indicator.

Project proposals receiving less than 60% of the score between the strategic and operational relevance 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 *To be developed at a later stage*

III.1. Application procedure

III.2. Assessment procedure

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 process¹.

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.
2. The right to complain against a decision regarding the project selection applies to the Lead Applicant whose project application (either EoI or AF) 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

¹ 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.

- 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.