

Guidelines for Awarding Financial Support to Third Parties (Tourism SMEs)

The selection of third parties which may receive financial support from beneficiaries in the COSME co-funded action “Boosting the uptake of digitalisation, innovation and new technologies in tourism through transnational cooperation and capacity building” (GRO/SME/20/C/07)

Beneficiaries of the call (GRO/SME/20/C/07) are requested to:

- provide financial support to the tourism SMEs in line with the provisions of the Call for Proposals, particularly Sections 12.1f and 12.2. The conditions to award financial support to third parties are laid down in Article 11a of the Model Grant Agreement.

The above mentioned Article 11a requires that Annex 1 of the grant agreement includes, among other conditions, the persons or categories of persons that may receive financial support.

At this regards, Article 204 of the Financial Regulation forbids the exercise of discretion by the beneficiaries when defining the conditions for the giving of such financial support to third parties.

These third parties shall be selected through open calls.

Projects must publish widely their open calls and respect principles of transparency, equal treatment, conflict of interest and confidentiality. All calls for third parties must be published by the beneficiary/ies on a relevant web site linked to the project (call page). The calls must remain open for at least two months. If call deadlines are changed this must immediately be published on the relevant call page and all registered applicants must be informed of the change.

Further technical details are available within the Call`s Terms of Reference.

It is the responsibility of the applicants to define in their project proposals the rules for publishing the call for applications, and for evaluating and selecting the third parties that may receive financial support.

Nevertheless, aiming to assist the beneficiaries in the definition of those rules, the Agency provides the following guidance. This guidance is not to be construed as biding obligations on the beneficiaries, which, ultimately, remain responsible for defining the rules and principles that they will apply for selecting third parties.

1. Introduction

Your call should be carried out in the light of the following basic principles:

- i. **Excellence.** The proposal(s) selected for funding must demonstrate a high quality in the context of the topics and criteria set out in the call;
- ii. **Transparency.** Funding decisions must be based on clearly described rules and procedures, and all applicants should receive adequate feedback on the outcome of the evaluation of their proposals;

- iii. **Fairness and impartiality.** All proposals submitted to a call are treated equally. They are evaluated impartially on their merits, irrespective of their origin or the identity of the applicants;
- iv. **Confidentiality.** All proposals and related data, knowledge and documents are treated in confidence;
- v. **Efficiency and speed.** Evaluation of proposals and award of the financial support should be as rapid as possible, commensurate with maintaining the quality of the evaluation, and respecting the legal framework.

The costs to the action of managing the open call are limited to those which are actual, economic and necessary¹. They may be claimed under the relevant cost category.

2. Preparation activities

The Call Announcement

You will inform the Agency Project Adviser about the call contents at least 30 days prior to its expected date of publication, by submitting to him/her a deliverable for approval. The deliverable must include a draft of your Call Announcement, full Call details and a reference to the relevant web page where the full details are to be published.

Thereafter, a complete test version of the website (call page) must be available for your Project Adviser to verify at least 5 days before the expected date of publication of the Call Announcement.

The Full Call Details

You should prepare a dedicated section of your action's website (call page), which will give proposers the Full Call Details. This must contain:

- A clear description of the support scheme for SMEs your project is offering. Applicant SMEs need to clearly understand through the Call: what are the objectives of the project, what kind of activities your project is offering/organising and how the selected SMEs would benefit from, and what kind of objectives do you set for SMEs participating in the scheme
- A clear and exhaustive list of the types of activities that qualify for receiving financial support, in line with the specific objectives of your project.
- Any restrictions on participation in any part of the call (e.g. only certain types of organisation are required, only organisations based in certain countries etc.).
- The criteria determining the award of the financial support. Applicants are required in their applications to convince you why they are among the most suitable enterprises to participate in the support scheme you propose. An SME in its application should convince you that it will be successful in learning, adapting and meeting the targets, and that it has a potential to achieve the best results in line with your project's specific objectives, when compared to other potential candidates.
- The criteria for determining the exact amount of financial support and the form (ex. lump sums, vouchers etc.) that the financial support may take.
- The specific arrangements that the beneficiaries may impose on the third parties (e.g. specific reporting and feedback obligations from the third party towards the beneficiary in respect to the implementation of the supported activities; specific arrangements for providing the financial support; specific rights for the beneficiaries to access and use the

¹ Article 6 of the Model Grant Agreement

- results of the supported activities).
- The coordinates (email address and telephone number) of a help facility which you must maintain for proposers during the call
 - The email address to which proposals should be submitted and the call identifier which will be used on these emails
 - The deadline for submission of applications, clearly specifying the local time involved (normally this is local time at the website where the applications are received).

For selecting the third parties that may receive financial support, you are advised to ask for factual applications from tourism SMEs, relatively simple to complete.

All applicants must receive fair and equal treatment. Information or facilities which you supply to any applicant must be equally available to all.

3. Publication of the call

The Call Announcement must be published at least on the relevant website.

The call must remain open for the submission of applications for a period of at least two months. If call deadlines are changed, this must immediately be published on the call page and all registered applicants (if there are any) must be informed of the change.

4. Reception of Applications

You are advised to close the call on a Wednesday, so that your help facility is available to applicants throughout the last three days of the call, and that there are two working days after the call to deal with any unresolved problems. You should close your call at 17h00 *local time*.

Applicants are asked to submit their applications by email. On receipt of each application you will email an Acknowledgment of Receipt to the applicant(see Annex 2).

You cannot accept late submissions; late submitters must receive by return email a "call closed" message from you.

You should evaluate the applications as submitted: after the close of call no additions or changes to received applications should be taken into account.

5. Evaluation and Selection

Evaluation criteria

The beneficiaries will evaluate applications received in the light of the criteria laid down in the Full Call Details. You may use the attached form (see Annex 3).

The beneficiaries remain responsible for the evaluation towards the third parties. Beneficiaries can choose to coordinate the exercise internally or through the assistance of experts¹.

It is recommended that two evaluators linked to the beneficiaries evaluate each of the proposals.

If you engage experts for evaluating the applications, you must ensure that they are independent of

¹ The selection of these experts should follow the conditions foreseen in Article 10 of the Model Grant Agreement.

the organisations involved in the consortium and of any applicant.

Evaluators should sign with you a declaration of confidentiality concerning the contents of the applications they read (see Annex 4). The form which they use in the evaluation also carries a declaration of freedom from conflict of interest which they agree to by signing them.

(It is a wise precaution to be prepared to bring in a “reserve” expert in case of sickness or the last-minute discovery of a conflict of interest.)

Evaluation procedure

The evaluation should take place at a maximum of six weeks from the close of the call. Note that you can only finally confirm the appointment of your experts after the close of call, when you have discovered who all the applicants are and therefore you can select your experts without risk of conflict of interest.

Each evaluator will record his/her individual opinion of each application on the attached evaluation form. They will then meet or communicate together to prepare a single “consensus” form for each application, representing opinions and scores on which the evaluators agree and which they will sign.

Using the overall scores for each application, the evaluators will generate a ranked list, or several ranked lists if the call is in different parts.

Selection of Applications

Using the scores given on the consensus form, you will normally select the highest scored application/s for the call (or for the different part of the call if more than one).

However, the beneficiary is not obliged to select the highest scoring application where it has objective grounds for objecting to the third party, for example commercial competition. In this case the choice may pass to the next-ranked application.

The consortium may conclude that even the highest scoring application is of inadequate quality, in which case it will make no selection. This conclusion is obligatory if all the applications fall below the threshold scores given on the attached evaluation form.

In the event of no selection being made or selection of limited number of applications only, you may re-open the call at a later date.

6. Reporting

Reporting

In a deliverable taking the form of a written report submitted one month after the conclusion of the evaluation process, you will supply the Agency Project Adviser with a brief report on the evaluation and selection process, comprising as a minimum:

- A report of the call and its evaluation (including e.g. dates of call, publications used, dates of evaluation etc.), and the outcome indicating the selected applicant(s);
- A listing of applications received, identifying the proposing organisations involved (name and address)

- The names and affiliations of the evaluators/experts involved in the evaluation;
- If the applicant selected was not the highest scoring one, the report must record the objective reasons why the highest scoring one was passed over.

The signed individual and consensus forms – alongside all other relevant documents - used in the evaluation should be retained by the beneficiaries for at least 5 years since ex-ante or ex-post financial and/or auditing checks may be carried out accordingly by the contracting authority.

Communications with applicants

After the evaluation of the applications, you will get into contact with the successful applicant(s).

Remember that the beneficiaries are responsible for the proper use of the funding by the recipients and must ensure that they comply with certain obligations under the grant agreement with the the Agency.

Obligations that must be extended to recipients:

- Avoiding conflicts of interest
- Maintaining confidentiality
- Promoting the action and giving visibility to the EU funding
- Liability for damages

In order to be able to fulfil this obligation, the beneficiaries should impose contractual arrangements on the recipients (including control measures and/or reducing the financial support).

You will communicate to the other applicants that their application was not successful in the call, and will enclose to each an unsigned version of the consensus report of the evaluation of their application.

Annex 1 – Call announcement format

Announcement of an open call for recipients of financial support

Action acronym: XXX

Action grant agreement number: XXX

Action full name: YYY

The action XXX, co-funded from the European Union's COSME programme under grant agreement No XXX, foresees as an eligible activity the provision of financial support to third parties, as a mean to achieve its own objectives.

The types of activities to perform that qualify for receiving financial support are XXX.

Deadline: XXX

Expected duration of participation: XXX

Maximum amount of financial support for each third party: XXX

Call identifier: XXX call

Language in which proposal should be submitted: XXX

Web address for further information (full call text/proposal guidelines): www.xxx-project.eu

Email address for further information: XXX@XXX.com

Annex 2 - Acknowledgment of receipt

Acknowledgement of receipt

Dear XXX,

Thank you for submitting your application for consideration to receive financial support in the frame of the COSME action XXX.

This evaluation will take place in the next few weeks. You will be notified as soon as possible after this of whether your application has been successful or not.

On behalf of the consortium of the project XXX I would like to thank you for your interest in our activities.

Yours sincerely,

Annex 3 – Evaluation form

Individual evaluation/Consensus (delete as appropriate)

Proposal No. :	Acronym :
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<p>1. Award criterion 1 <i>Note: when a proposal only partially addresses the topics, this condition will be reflected in the scoring of this criterion</i></p>	<p>Score: <i>(Minimum threshold 3/5;)</i></p>
<p>2. Award criterion 2</p>	<p>Score: <i>(Minimum threshold 3/5;)</i></p>

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

3. Award criterion 3	Score: <i>(Minimum threshold 3/5;)</i>
Remarks	Overall score: <i>(Minimum threshold 10/15)</i>

I declare that, to the best of my knowledge, I have no direct or indirect conflict of interest in the evaluation of this proposal

Name	
Signature	
Date	

Name	
Signature	
Date	

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

Annex 4 – Confidentiality and conflict of interest declaration

I the undersigned declare that, in participating as an independent expert in the evaluation of proposals received in the COSME open call of the action XXX

I undertake to treat as confidential all information contained in the proposals which I am asked to evaluate, both during the evaluation and afterwards.

I will not reveal to any third party the identity or any details of the views of my fellow evaluator(s), neither during the evaluation nor afterwards.

I do not, to the best of my knowledge, have any interest in any of the proposals submitted in this call, I have not been involved in their preparation and I do not benefit either directly or indirectly from the eventual selection. Should I discover a conflict of interest during the evaluation, I undertake to declare this and to withdraw from the evaluation.

Name	
Signature	
Date	