Top tips for a successful application – Q&A

This is collection of the questions not answered during the 'Top tips for a successful application' webinar on 18 October 2022. If your question has neither been answered between 10.00 and 11.00 in the webinar, nor in this collection, please check the last 15 minutes of the recording, as some additional questions were answered between 11.00 and 11.15.

Project Relevance

Is it OK to put evidence for demand / transnational need / previous project in the annex?
In the annex, you have the possibility to upload visual items (e.g. a flowchart, map, a list of items referred to in the application form, graphs, etc.), which can enhance the readers' overall understanding of your project. Please note that the uploaded file cannot be text based. Any text included in the annex to extend text fields in the application will be disregarded during the assessment. Moreover, each section of the uploaded file must include a clear reference to the text field to which it is linked in the application form.

With limited characters available in stage 1 (expression of interest), is it better to deepen general explanations or mention an example (that does not show the full extent of the topic)?
In an expression of interest (EoI), there is no dedicated question asking about the common territorial challenge(s) that will be tackled by the project. The need, urgency of and demand for the project should be, however, an integral part of the project summary and other relevant application fields. It is important that the reader is able to understand the gaps and challenges you are addressing. This can be done by either providing a more in-depth explanation or providing evidence, numbers and examples. It will depend on the application, the challenge definition and the topic at hand which approach better justifies the need for the project. To avoid text issues due to the limited number of characters, you can also spread the justification over the different sections rather than putting everything in the summary.

Can we develop an integral project with topics from more than one specific objective (SO), e.g. a project on smart grids (SO 2.3) that partly includes circularity (SO 2.4)?
Our specific objectives do not operate in silos, and the fact that an application touches upon the challenges addressed in several specific objectives is rarely a reason for rejection. However, it is essential that you apply under the specific objective under which the project overall objective, the project's approach and activities fit best. This will also have an impact on project design. If you are in doubt under which specific objective to apply, please get in touch with the JS project advisors (until October 21) or the National Contact Points (until November 14).

How to provide all the required detail, justification and info in the small-scale project (SSP) application, which is limited in terms of characters (2,000)?

In a small-scale project application, you are asked to provide, amongst others, a project summary (2000 characters), an explanation of the common territorial challenge(s) tackled (1500), an overview of how the project will, in a novel way, tackle the identified common challenges (1500) and a justification for why this is to be addressed transnationally (1500). In these fields, there is no difference to the full application form of a regular project. In general, it is important that the reader is able to understand the gaps and challenges you are addressing. This can both be done either by providing a more in-depth explanation or by providing evidence, numbers and examples. It will depend on the application, the challenge definition and the topic at hand which approach, or whether a combination of approaches, better justifies the need for the project.

<u>Intervention logic and work plan</u>

Can you elaborate a bit on the results, which are now defined in pilot actions, strategies and action plans, and organisations cooperating across border?

Pilot actions, strategies and action plans, and organisations cooperation across borders are output indicators. Output indicators must be chosen on work package level. An output is the logical consequence of the activities carried out in the respective work package. The output must correspond to one of the output indicators.

Of the three indicators mentioned, there are only two that you can actively choose: pilots and strategies and action plans. The programme counts the number of organisations that participate as project partners in the respective project. As an applicant you do not have to set targets or report on achievements on this indicator, as this is calculated automatically in the Online Monitoring System (the system in which you fill out and submit your application).

A pilot action developed jointly and implemented in a project is a practical measure implemented in the context of a project that tests or demonstrates one novel solution (e.g. procedures, instruments, tools, approaches and methods or the transfer of working practices). A solution is considered to be novel if it is either new or applied in a new context. The aim of a pilot is to test, validate and/or improve the solution.

A jointly developed *strategy* sets a general direction in a certain subject to achieve a desired goal in the future. An *action plan* is a detailed plan outlining actions needed to reach one or more goals, laid down in the strategy. It is one step further than a strategy towards actual/physical implementation.

Results, on the other hand, capture the accumulated benefits of all work packages. You can choose between three result indicators:
1. Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations
2. Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations
3. Organisations with increased institutional capacity due to their participation in cooperation activities across borders

Each result indicator links to an output indicator and measures the wider uptake of the corresponding output.

Please see fact sheet 22 for further information and definitions.

Strategy plans and action plans seem to be plans/reports and not solutions, for example. Are these deliverables? If yes, what are you looking for in outputs?
Please see the question above for further elaborations on the output indicators available to you (strategies and action plans, pilot actions). Outputs are the logical consequence of the activities carried out in a work package, and must correspond to one of the output indicators.

Deliverables, on the other hand, are a quantification of the activities in a work package. These are the steps that need to be implemented to achieve the work package objective and the work package outputs. Deliverables will be chosen from a drop-down menu (Report, Communication initiative, Internal event, External event, Data collection activity, Other).

Please see fact sheet 22 for further information and definitions.

Do deliverables also apply to small-scale applications? And it is correctly understood that small-scale projects only have ONE work package?
In a small-scale project application, as in the full application, activities need to be quantified through deliverables. It is correct that a small-scale project consists of a single work package.

<u>Communication</u>

Several target groups are focused on in our project (public authorities on different levels; academic actors). Would you recommend to focus just on 2, maximal 3?
There is no upper or lower limit to the number of target groups you should address in your project. It is relevant that their involvement makes sense and is necessary to achieve your objectives. Involving target

groups merely for the sake of increasing the number of target groups does not give a higher chance of approval.

Communications - is it C7.3? There does not appear to be a C6.3
Indeed, the project's approach to communication is addressed in section 7.3. in the full application.

Partnership

Which role can Norwegian partners have in EoI and full applications?
For Calls 2 and 3, Norwegian funding is not available due to exhausted Norwegian funds. This means that Norwegian organisations cannot join projects as partners in these calls. However, Norwegian organisations are welcome to participate in projects as observers. This means that the Norwegian organisations' interest and participation in the project can be described in the application, but they will not be listed as part of the partnership, nor can project activities or results be dependent on their participation. Following from this, they will not be included in the project contract or partnership agreement.

Opportunities for Norwegian organisations to join Interreg North Sea projects from Call 4 will be announced at a later date, pending further decisions on funding by the national Norwegian authorities at the end of 2022 or early 2023.

What is the maximum of partners you can have in one member state?
There is no limit to the number of partners per country. The only requirement to the composition of the partnership is that organisations from at least three countries in the programme area must be involved. In small-scale projects, the maximum number of partners is seven.

How do you differentiate between partners and sub-partners?
The majority of project partners are regular project partners. In some cases, however, a few of the administrative requirements can be simplified to encourage the participation of small organisations with limited resources, or larger organisations that only wish to play a very limited role in the project (for example, acting as a test case in a small pilot). For these organisations it is possible to become a sub-partner of a partner in the same country. In this set-up the partner is responsible for managing administrative activities for one or more sub-partners

All programme rules regarding legal status and eligibility apply to both partners and sub-partners. Please see Fact Sheet 14 for more information.

Budget

Can you give an indication of the size of the budget you would expect for a project in priority 3?
A general guideline is to plan a project with a budget of €3 to 5 million. However, some of the projects approved in Call 1 had higher budgets, and it is rare that an application is rejected outright due to its budget. The most important point when it comes to budgeting is that the project budget is a clear reflection of the costs associated with the projects' activities. Does the budget per partner and for the project as a whole reflect what the partnership expects to accomplish during the project lifetime? Does it represent added value for the programme? These self-reflection questions apply to all programme priorities.

What if a partner wants to bring a part of a bigger action (e.g. infrastructure activities) into the project budget?
The budget line 'infrastructure and works' covers planned costs and expenditure linked to the planning and execution of permanent buildings and/or installations. It is expected that costs incurred under 'infrastructure and works' will be limited for the majority of projects funded under the North Sea Programme.

Costs for infrastructure and works include the following:

- purchase of land not exceeding 10 % of the total eligible expenditure for the project concerned
- building permits
- building materials
- labour
- specialised interventions (e.g. soil remediation, mine-clearing)

Given these parameters, it is unclear how you would divide 'infrastructure and works' into smaller parts. If you are referring, rather, to equipment or investments, these have other guidelines and rules. Please contact a JS project advisor for advice on your particular case.

To which extent should the budget already be allocated in the application phase?
In the application, you will have to specify the planned budget for staff costs, travel and accommodation, external expertise and services, equipment and infrastructure and works on partner level. All but office and administration costs (15% of staff costs) and travel and accommodation are further broken down in individual cost items.

Together, the partners' total budget result in the project's total eligible budget. Please note that in case of approval, the programme cannot pay out more funding than has been allocated in the approved application.

In case of approval, the programme only reimburses costs that a partner has incurred in order to implement the project, and that are directly linked to the budget and the activities in the approved application. Expenditure incurred for activities which are not specifically covered or logically linked to activities in the approved application is ineligible. If you wish to carry out other activities, you must apply to the programme to change your application.

Is the appetite for matched funding by partners an acceptable reason for variation in funding, if they take in different amounts of work in the project?
As we are uncertain about how to understand this question, please get in touch directly with an advisor in the priority area in which you wish to apply.

I thought that there could be given an amount of the budget outside the region?
During the VB period, there was a rule that only up to 20% of the project budget could be spent outside the programme area. This included the budgets of partners located outside the area. in the VIB period, there is no limit to the percentage of the budget that can be allocated to project partners or activities outside of the programme area (see Fact Sheet 17). However, please note that organisations based in countries that are not in the programme area (whether inside or outside the EU) cannot participate in North Sea Programme projects as partners. If you would like to include a partner from outside the programme area, you must provide a clear justification for this, e.g. that the partner's expertise cannot be found within the programme area.

In general, it is important to note that all activities and partners outside the programme area must contribute to the objectives of the programme.

<u>Other</u>

Are there any requirements for electronic signatures?
For full applications and small-scale project applications, the lead partner needs to assign an authorised signatory in order to be able to submit the application.
The authorised signatory is an individual who, on a daily basis, is able to validate and legally sign documentation on behalf of the partner. The capacity of the authorised signatory can be by delegated mandate.

For the appointment process, please see the following guidance: https://www.interregnorthsea.eu/sites/default/files/2022-09/Guidance_Appointing-an-authorised-signatory.pdf.

How do I work with the OMS?

Depending on the stage of your project idea, please see detailed guidance here: https://www.interregnorthsea.eu/resources#project-guidance-by-stage