Questions&Answers
Get on Track Towards North Sea Funding
Part 2: Get Ready to Apply
30th August, 2022 Online

From project idea to project application

In addition to questions submitted prior to the event (the answers to which can be found directly in the presentation), participants posted additional questions during the meeting. The text below summarises the answers to the questions.

Q1: Re-applying – can a project re-apply when an Expression of Interest (EoI) was rejected?

A: In short, yes. Together with the decision for rejection there are always reasons for the rejection. All applicants are strongly encouraged to talk to the Joint Secretariat to discuss the reasons for rejection and the feedback coming from the Monitoring Committee and from the Joint Secretariat.

Q2: To what extent can skills development and a focus on skills development be a main project objective under objective 1?

A: This depends on the context and how you link the skills development to the core of the priority. While skills development can be addressed by projects under priority 1, the overall setting for the project should be clear and should be clearly linked to the core of the specific objective chosen by the project. Of special relevance in this context is specific objective 1.2 Developing skills for smart specialisation. In principle, this will be reflected on a case-by-case basis and again our advice would be to contact us.

Q3: Will the North Sea region programme provide a template for budget planning?

A: This is not really the case as this is very individual for the projects depending on what they plan to do. We, however, encourage everyone to register to the Online Monitoring System (OMS) which provides access to the application form and to the project level budget where you can see all budget lines for North Sea projects.

Q4: To what extent can a project be changed once an EoI is approved?

A: Together with the EoI approval there will be a decision letter with points raised both by the Monitoring Committee and by the Joint Secretariat. These should be addressed by the project. It is recommended to stick to these points and not to introduce new/other changes as you risk to present a new project with the full application which will affect and jeopardise the assessment.

Q5: Could you elaborate more on the reporting rules and the timelines?

A: There are different procedures for the different projects. For example, for small scale projects the procedure is different from the regular projects – e.g. small scale projects will have a mid-term review (including a mid-term report) and a final report and we are working on the procedure right now. For regular projects, the procedure is similar to the current period, which means that projects will report twice per year and the first report should be submitted within the first year of the project implementation.

Q6: When will the successful round 1 projects be announced in order for those who are currently developing project ideas to be able to avoid duplications?

A: The selection of projects will take place at the end of September during the meeting of the North Sea's Monitoring Committee and the successful projects will be published right away on the website. Then the lead beneficiary can be contacted to talk about the project and what is it that they plan to do.
We already have 3 small scale projects approved under call 1 and these are already on the website and can be contacted.
(First approvals in the new programme, Interreg VIB North Sea Region Programme)

Q7: What are the start & end dates of the second step of the application after the decision early spring 2023?

A: Decisions about call 2 project applications will be taken in early March 2023.
Call 3 of the programme will open in March and close in June 2023. If your call 2 Expression of Interest will get approved beginning of 2023, you will be able to apply in call 3 for a full application. Decisions will then be taken in October 2023.
More information about the next calls can be found here: https://northsearegion.eu/new-programme/calls-for-applications/

Q8: We are working on a project and we are planning to include a voucher scheme to recruit/select and support SMEs during the project duration. For the moment we are waiting on getting more information under which conditions such a voucher scheme is possible in the NSR programme. Do you have more information?

A: The Joint Secretariat has worked on guidance regarding the use of voucher schemes. The guidance will be presented to the Monitoring Committee of the programme and will be decided on end of September 2022. As soon as more information is available on voucher schemes, you will find it on our website.

Q9: It is possible to see this presentation again later? I missed the first 10 minutes.

A: The presentation can be found here: https://northsearegion.eu/media/21917/get-ready-to-apply_to_be_published.pdf

Q10: The available North Sea program on the website is marked as draft. Will there still be a final version?

A: Our programme got approved on 11 August 2022. You can find the Interreg North Sea Programme 2021-2027 here: https://northsearegion.eu/new-programme/resources/key-documents/

Q11: How to budget possible increase of investment costs due to increasing prices (energy costs, material costs, general increase of resource costs due to war, etc.)?

A: The Joint Secretariat cannot give any advice on this because it is really difficult to forecast expenses these days. Please be aware that the North Sea Programme is funding investments but this is not the main focus of North Sea projects. Hence, a limited number of projects is expected to include one or more investments.

Q12: Would it be possible to submit a report (progress + financial) for 2023 and afterwards every six months? How flexible are we?

A: The reporting schedule must be discussed with the individual project advisor. In general, it is expected that your project will report on a regular basis. Submission of the first report will be required no later than 12 months after the project has been approved. The submission of the first report defines the next reporting submission deadlines. Every six months a report must be submitted to the Joint Secretariat.

Q13: When is factsheet 21 available (guidelines for final reporting)? What about the other pending factsheets?

A: The Joint Secretariat is constantly working on the pending fact sheets and proposes drafts for the Monitoring Committee. Once a fact sheet gets approved by the Monitoring Committee, it will be published on the programme's website. Fact sheet 21 (final reporting) is in the pipeline at the moment, but has not been finalised yet.

Q 14: We are thinking of submitting an application and we are wondering which way to go: submit first an EoI and then a full application or should we start with a small-scale project?

A: A small-scale project must be a stand-alone project. That means that there must be an objective you are aiming for and outputs and results that you wish to achieve by the end of the project lifetime. If you have a well-defined piece of work that can be implemented within maximum 1 1/2 years with a partnership of 3-7 organisations and a budget of up to €500.000, then the small-scale project is the way to go. Of course, if at the end of this project you see that the objective you've been working toward could be expanded and there is good reason to construct a regular project from that, then you could consider applying for funds for a regular project that builds from the small-scale project. The bottom line is that a small-scale project is not intended to provide seed money for drawing up a full application.

If your ambitions are such that you know you would need more than 18 months, 3-7 partners and €500.000 to accomplish something in a project, then we would recommend that you start with an EoI, which is the first stage application for regular projects. Submitting an EoI provides you with an opportunity to get feedback on your project idea at an early stage and improve it by the full application stage. While the EoI should provide a good idea of what the project aims for and will deliver as well as who will work on it, there is still room for further elaboration and improvement if the idea is approved by the programme's Monitoring Committee. As mentioned under the previous questions, we always provide feedback on EoIs, and this helps strengthen an application that is moving from EoI to full application stage.

Project Partnerships

In this part of the session, we draw on the rich experience of our National Contact Points. Here are the key points they shared with the participants:

Q1: Main tips for a partnership – where to start?

A: Once you have the idea, it is necessary to consider which type of organisations are needed in order to reach your project's goals and results. Once you know who you need in your project, you can start looking for these partners – you can look in your own networks – this is a good source for partner identification, so don't underestimate them. Word-to-mouth can be very useful as well.

Look also at the database of VB projects (Project database, Interreg VB North Sea Region Programme)and in particular those organisations that work on similar topics – this information is available on the programme's website – e.g. the impacts space (Our impact, Interreg VB North Sea Region Programme) on the website. The national databases, where you can find information on projects and project partners involved in different programmes, are another source of inspiration.

Think about the Contact Points who can help as there is a well-established, regular exchange between them which also extends to supporting projects in finding partners in the partner countries of the North Sea programme.

You can also submit your projects idea on the programme's webspace – this can also boost your partner search (Project ideas North Sea Programme 2021-2027, Interreg VB North Sea Region Programme).

Last but not least, use umbrella, specialist organisations and networks to spread your ideas and look for partners.

Q2: What are the characteristics of a strong partnership during the application phase of a project?

A: To start with, it is important to work together on a topic and not in isolation. This means there is a need for strong transnational cooperation, active involvement and will to work and cooperate transnationally as well as to learn from each other. Each partner should have its weight in the partnership – relevant for the issue the project tackles, with strong knowledge but also complementary skills which would ensure that the issue is tackled from all relevant angles. Again, the focus is on having a partnership that is able to deliver against set goals and objectives. For example, in a governance project, partners that can influence policy will be often needed. Partner organisations also need to have the relevant resources to carry out the project – human and financial capacity to participate in the project as all partners need to fulfil administrative tasks. The financial capacity of all partners is important since in Interreg the costs of partners are reimbursed. This means that expenses are made and later these are reimbursed by the programme during reporting. There is no payment in advance.
For the lead beneficiary it is particularly important to have strong capacity to lead the whole partnership. Strong communication skills are key in this respect and being proactive in talking to the partners.

Keeping the partnership manageable in terms of number of partners is key. There is no specific number and partnerships sizes differ from project to project; it is necessary however to be able to work smoothly on the project and stay in regular communication throughout the duration of the project.

Q3: What about partnership during implementation?

A: Planning regular meetings and setting the scene in such a way as to build strong ties early on is crucial. While online meetings have become the norm during the pandemic, we strongly recommend to make sure to meet in person as well in order to get to know each other and build trust for the work ahead and for implementing the project.
Reaching out to the Contact Points and to the Secretariat as early as possible is crucial and you can benefit from shared National Contact Point consultations where you get several NCPs involved and receive plenty of feedback from the member states.

When it comes to the lead partner, it is recommended to establish early on robust procedures in place to follow on the progress made by all project partners and know if things are going according to plan. And in case of signs of delayed implementation or an inactive actor, take action and get in contact to understand what is going on.

Q4: Is a university outside of the programme area allow to be part of the partnership? In this case this is related to a specific expertise.

A: As a basic rule all partners and expenditure should be from the programme area. However, there are special procedures to be kept in mind. Firstly, should the partnership involve a partner from outside of the North Sea area, they should provide a special competence and benefit for the programme area which should be explained in the application – i.e. it should be clear why a partner from the programme area cannot provide the same competency and benefit.

A more detailed explanation on the participation of partners from outside the eligible area can be found in Fact Sheet 17: https://northsearegion.eu/media/19326/vib-17-partners-and-activities-outside-the-programme-area.pdf

What makes a project stick from start to end

We also had two experienced project colleagues present during our webinar. Ronald Jorna from the Province of Overijssel and Tineke Smegen from the Province of Drenthe. Both colleagues are form the Netherlands and lead partners in ongoing North Sea projects.

When asking Ronald Jorna from the Bicycles and ITS (BITS) project about good tips that will make a project successful, he provided the following answers:

1) You have to have a **clear vision on what you want to achieve**. All actions in the project should contribute to this goal. For example, in our BITS project the goal is to implement ICT solutions to make cycling more attractive, e.g. faster

green for cyclists at traffic lights. If partners want to implement new ICT solutions we will always ask: Will it make cycling more attractive? In this way we are sure that all actions will contribute to the project objective.

2) **A European project is a real team effort**. You can only achieve something together if all partners feel responsible for the results of the project. Within one organization you have a hierarchical structure, and ultimately it is the boss who decides what needs to be done. In a European project there is no real hierarchy, and you don't have a 'whip'. So, you can only achieve a good result if all partners feel responsible, and this can be done by creating a real team feeling through social events, bike tours, joint dinners, etc. In your full application you have to take this into account when calculating your travel budget, meetings, etc. Online meetings are very cheap, but the benefits of physical meetings definitely will outweigh the costs of these physical meetings.

Tineke Smegen from the SURFLOGH project also has shared her experience on what makes a project stick from start to end:

- Most important thing in my opinion is to meet in person. Digitial times are good but meeting in person is really good to see each other into the eyes and talk about what you want to do – especially in transnational projects. I am currently developing new ideas with my team and already during the project building phase we meet the other potential partners in person to see if there is the real "click". Body language is so important and this is something you will only find out when you meet a person in real life.

Thanks for sharing your valuable insights into good project management. Since we know that the two of you are involved in drafting new applications, we are wishing you good luck.