

Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme Announcement of the first call for proposals - step 1

12 February 2015

1. ANNOUNCEMENT

The Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme invites public and private organisations established in the central Europe regions to submit applications in the framework of the first call for proposals. The detailed conditions and the timeline for the 1st call for proposals can be found in the “Application manual first call” included in the “Application package first call”. The application package constitutes an integral part of this call announcement and can be downloaded from the programme website www.interreg-central.eu/call.

2. OBJECTIVES

The Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme is funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) under the European Territorial Cooperation objective which supports regional cooperation among central European countries during the programming period 2014-2020.

The Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme supports regional cooperation among nine central European countries. The overall objective of the programme is “to cooperate beyond borders to make central European cities and regions better places to live and work” by implementing smart solutions answering to regional challenges in the fields of innovation, low-carbon economy, environment, culture and transport.

The programme runs from 2014 to 2020 and invests EUR 231 million to co-finance transnational cooperation projects promoted by public and private organisations from central European regions. Projects supported shall deliver concrete and visible outputs and results in response to well-identified challenges of the programme area and addressing development needs in an integrated manner. Projects focussing on purely academic cooperation or basic research or aiming at mere networking and exchanging of experience and/or not demonstrating the translation of outputs arising from “soft” actions (surveys, studies, etc.) into concrete and sustainable results will not be supported by the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme.

The Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Cooperation Programme document adopted by the European Commission on 16 December 2014 constitutes the legal basis for this call for proposals.

3. PROGRAMME AREA

The CENTRAL EUROPE programme area includes all regions from Austria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, as well as eight Länder from Germany (Baden-Württemberg, Bayern, Berlin, Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Sachsen, Sachsen-Anhalt, Thüringen) and nine regions from Italy (Emilia-Romagna, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Liguria, Lombardia, Piemonte, Provincia Autonoma Bolzano, Provincia Autonoma Trento, Valle d’Aosta, and Veneto).

4. THEMATIC PRIORITIES

The first call for proposals is open to all programme priority axes and all specific objectives, summarised in the following table:

<p>Priority axis 1 - Cooperating on innovation to make CENTRAL EUROPE more competitive</p>	<p>Priority axis 2 - Cooperating on low-carbon strategies in CENTRAL EUROPE</p>
<p>Specific objectives:</p> <p>1.1 To improve sustainable linkages among actors of the innovation systems for strengthening regional innovation capacity in central Europe</p> <p>1.2 To improve skills and entrepreneurial competences for advancing economic and social innovation in central European regions</p>	<p>Specific objectives:</p> <p>2.1 To develop and implement solutions for increasing energy efficiency and renewable energy usage in public infrastructures</p> <p>2.2 To improve territorially based low-carbon energy planning strategies and policies supporting climate change mitigation</p> <p>2.3 To improve capacities for mobility planning in functional urban areas to lower CO₂ emissions</p>
<p>Priority axis 3 - Cooperating on natural and cultural resources for sustainable growth in CENTRAL EUROPE</p>	<p>Priority axis 4 - Cooperating on transport to better connect CENTRAL EUROPE</p>
<p>Specific objectives:</p> <p>3.1 To improve integrated environmental management capacities for the protection and sustainable use of natural heritage and resources</p> <p>3.2 To improve capacities for the sustainable use of cultural heritage and resources</p> <p>3.3 To improve environmental management of functional urban areas to make them more liveable places</p>	<p>Specific objectives:</p> <p>4.1 To improve planning and coordination of regional passenger transport systems for better connections to national and European transport networks</p> <p>4.2 To improve coordination among freight transport stakeholders for increasing multimodal environmentally-friendly freight solutions</p>

For a detailed description of contents of each priority axis and programme specific objective, including information on possible actions, beneficiaries and target groups, please refer to section 2 of the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme document adopted by the European Commission on 16 December 2014. Information on further programme documents, as well as other relevant information sources, is available in part A, chapter V of the application manual.

Under the terms of this call, a project proposal must focus on only one priority axis and one programme specific objective.

5. ERDF BUDGET AVAILABLE

The programme will allocate up to EUR 80 Million ERDF to the first call for proposals.

6. SUBMISSION OF APPLICATIONS

The first call for proposals of the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme is organised according to a two-step procedure.

Step 1 Applicants have to submit a light application form providing an outline of the proposed project. The light application form goes beyond a mere expression of interest, which means that applicants have already in the first step to present a comprehensive picture of the project characteristics.

Step 2 Proposals pre-selected within step 1 of the call are invited to submit a “full application form” which includes additional details on the project work plan and budget. Applicants have to respect limitations in changes to their applications between step 1 and 2 of the call, with regard specifically to the project focus, the composition of the partnership and the budget (as further detailed in Part D, chapter I of the application manual).

Project proposals, both within step 1 and 2 of the call, must be submitted in English language and only through the web-based electronic monitoring system (eMS) available at <https://ems.interreg-central.eu/>. The application package for the first call contains also the off-line template of application form light and full, for information purposes only. Project proposals can be submitted only through eMS.

7. ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

In the framework of the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme, eligible applicants are:

- National, regional and local public bodies (including EGTCs in the meaning of Article 2(16) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013);
- Private institutions, including private companies, having legal personality;
- International organisations acting under the national law of any CENTRAL EUROPE Member State or, with restrictions, under international law.

8. PARTNERSHIP REQUIREMENTS

Projects supported by the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme must involve in the partnership:

- at least three financing partners,
- from at least three countries and
- being at least two of the partners located in CENTRAL EUROPE regions¹.

Applicants located outside the programme area but within the EU can also apply for funding as project partners. Please note that ERDF allocated to a single project for such partners, together with the ERDF spent outside the programme area, cannot exceed 20 % of the total ERDF contribution to such project. The involvement of partners from EU regions outside the programme area shall bring a clear benefit to the regions of the programme area. Their involvement is considered as exceptional and must be duly justified.

Applicants can also be located outside the EU, but they will not receive ERDF funding from the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme.

9. ELIGIBLE LEAD APPLICANTS

The following institutions can be lead applicants:

- National, regional and local public bodies (including EGTCs in the meaning of Article 2(16) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013);
- Private institutions, including private companies, having legal personality;
- International organisations acting under the national law of any CENTRAL EUROPE Member State.

Only institutions located in the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme area² can apply as lead applicants.

Private lead applicants have to comply with obligatory financial capacity requirements detailed in part D, chapter V.2 of the application manual. As these requirements will be checked by the programme only in step 2 of the call and since the lead applicant cannot change between step 1 and step 2 of the call (as described in part D, chapter I of the application manual), proposals submitted by private lead applicants not meeting the necessary financial capacity criteria will be rejected in step 2 - even if passing step 1 of the call. Private lead applicants should therefore carefully check their ability to fulfil the applicable financial capacity criteria before submitting their proposal in step 1 of the call.

10. PROJECT SIZE

The recommended financial size of projects to be submitted in the framework of the 1st call for proposals is in the range of EUR 1 to 5 million total cost. In exceptional cases, smaller or larger projects can be supported.

¹ Please note that German and Italian national public authorities/bodies which are competent in their scope of action for certain parts of the eligible area but which are located outside of it (e.g. ministries) are to all effects assimilated, both in terms of rights and obligations, to partners located in the programme area.

² Ditto.

The size of the partnership should reflect the scope of the project and remain manageable. Therefore, the recommended maximum size of a partnership should not exceed 12 partners. Larger partnerships are possible but need to be duly justified according to the specific project scope.

11. CO-FINANCING RATES

The following co-financing rates shall apply:

- Up to 85 % for applicants of Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia;
- Up to 80 % for applicants of Austria, Germany, Italy;
- Up to 80 % for applicants located in EU regions outside the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme area.

In case applicants intend to implement activities being considered as state aid relevant, the maximum grant will be calculated applying the *de minimis* regime³ while respecting the co-financing percentages listed above. Should the activities to be carried out by EU-partners from outside the CENTRAL EUROPE area be considered as state aid relevant, the participation of these partners will not be allowed due to the impossibility for the programme monitoring committee to validate the result of the state aid assessment on behalf of a Member State not participating in the programme.

12. PROJECT DURATION

The recommended project duration is 30 to 36 months. However, if justified by the project scope and the planned activities, a longer implementation period up to maximum 48 months could be acceptable.

13. AWARD CRITERIA

The selection of proposals is based on the assessment of received applications following a standardised procedure, which safeguards the principles of transparency and equal treatment.

Step 1 Following a formal/administrative compliance check, each proposal which has positively passed the formal/administrative check is assessed on its contents against the following two strategic assessment criteria:

- Relevance
- Partnership

Each criterion is composed of several sub-criteria measured according to scores (1 to 5). The number of applications pre-selected within step 1 shall ensure an adequate competition in step 2 of the call.

³ As referred to in Regulation (EU) No 1407/2013 on *de minimis* aid.

Step 2 Following a formal/administrative compliance check and - in case of private lead applicants - a lead applicant financial capacity check, each proposal which has positively passed these checks is assessed on its contents against the following four strategic and operational assessment criteria:

- Relevance
- Partnership
- Implementation
- Budget

Similarly to step 1, each criterion is composed of several sub-criteria measured according to scores (1 to 5).

14. DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION

Project proposals for step 1 of this call must be submitted through the eMS **at the latest by Monday 13 April 2015, 18.00 CET.**

15. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

More information regarding the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme, conditions for the submission of project proposals, assessment of proposals, the application package as well as other relevant information is available at:

www.interreg-central.eu/call

It is also possible to contact the representatives of the national contact points located in each CENTRAL EUROPE Member State as well as of the joint secretariat based in Vienna. Contact information is also available on the programme website.