



Interreg



Danube Transnational Programme

Applicants Manual

for the period 2014-2020

Version 1.1

PART 4: APPLICATION AND ASSESSMENT

edited by the Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat

Budapest, Hungary, 2016



Programme co-fundé par l'Union européenne

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I. Overview

Part 4 of the Applicants Manual 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. Application procedure

The AF is to be submitted electronically together with the other relevant documents via DTP website www.interreg-danube.eu.

The AF is composed of two parts:

- The PDF template, which contains detailed information regarding the partnership, intervention logic, the strategic relevance of the proposal, work packages, time frame and investments.
- The excel template, which contains detailed information regarding the budget.

ATTENTION: In order to be considered eligible, both the PDF and the excel templates duly filled in have to be submitted by the LAs. Please, note that in case one of the two files is missing the entire project will be considered ineligible. Please, also note that only the official templates provided by the Programme will be accepted.

Once filled in completely and accurately, the **AF (PDF and excel templates)** and its **Annexes** can be uploaded onto the dedicated section of the Programme website. Please, consider that all Applicants must submit the Partnership Agreement, the Co-financing and State Aid Declarations, while ASP and International Organization Declarations are to be submitted only if it is the case.

ATTENTION:

- Only **electronic submission** is allowed
- All the documents (pdf and xls parts of the AF and Annexes) have to be submitted in **one single package**.
- **For a submission to be valid, it has to contain at least the pdf and xls parts of the AF. Only the first submission containing both pdf and xls parts of the AF shall be taken into consideration.** No other version(s) of the pdf and xls AF shall be considered.
- **Once the e-version of the documents is submitted, changes are no longer possible.**

Once the deadline for submission has expired, the assessment is carried out by the JS. The assessment results are then presented to the MC which decides which projects will be financed by the Programme.

Following the assessment, the applicants might be requested to fulfil some conditions and/ or consider some recommendations with regard to their proposals (e.g. budget revision, correction of the intervention logic, dropping out the ineligible partners, etc.). Applicants are informed about the result of the assessment through electronic communication.

III. Assessment procedure

During the assessment process, two different sets of criteria are applied to come to the decision of approving an application: eligibility and quality criteria.

The **eligibility criteria** aim at confirming to the applicant that their proposal has arrived within the set deadline and that the Application Form is complete and conform to the requirements. As the eligibility criteria are of “knock-out nature”, they should be answered with a YES or NO as they are not subject to interpretation.

This phase will be carried out by the JS and assisted by the NCPs.

Failing to meet the eligibility requirements leads to the rejection of the proposal or to the rejection of the partner whom the eligibility problem is related to.

The following table lists all eligibility criteria at project level. Failure to meet any of the criteria below results in rejecting the whole proposal:

Nr	Eligibility criteria	Description
1	The AF in all its parts has been submitted within the set deadline (date and time)	The AF (inclusive of its PDF and excel parts) has been submitted within the date and time set in the Call announcement.
2	The AF in all its parts has been submitted in the official templates and through the DTP website	The AF (inclusive of its PDF and excel parts) has been submitted in the official templates and through the DTP website.
3	The AF in all its parts, including the annexes have been submitted in one single package	The AF (inclusive of its PDF and excel parts) and its annexes have been submitted in one single package through the programme website.
4	The AF is compiled in English	All parts of the AF are compiled in English, as the

		official language of the DTP.
5	Partnership is composed by at least three financing partners from at least three participating countries of which at least one (LP) is located in a Member State	Partnership complies with the minimum requirements for a transnational DTP partnership: at least three financing partners (receiving ERDF, IPA or ENI co-financing) from at least three DTP participating countries, of which at least one (LP) is located in a Member State.
6	Lead Applicant is an eligible beneficiary	The Lead Applicant fulfils the requirement set in Part 2, section II of the Applicants Manual.
7	At least 3 joint cooperation levels are indicated	According to Art 12(4) of EU reg. 1299/2013, among the four levels of cooperation (joint development, joint implementation, joint staffing and joint financing) beneficiaries shall cooperate in the development and implementation of projects and in either the staffing or the financing of projects, or in both.
8	The proposal contributes to at least two programme output indicators	The proposal contributes to the horizontal output indicator predefined in the AF and to at least another programme output indicator.
9	Completeness of Partnership Agreement	The Partnership Agreement is signed by all directly financed partners.

The following table lists the eligibility criteria applicable to individual partners. Failure to meet any of the criteria below by one partner results in rejecting the single partner affected:

Nr	Eligibility criteria	Description
10	Financed partners (ERDF/IPA/ENI) are eligible	The ERDF/IPA/ENI financed partners fulfil the requirements set in Part 2, section II of the Applicants Manual.
11	Completeness of submitted ERDF/IPA/ENI partner documents	The documents (Declaration of co-financing, State Aid declaration, Declaration for International organisations) are filled in and signed by the partners.
12	Completeness of submitted ASP	The document (ASP declaration) is filled in and signed by the ASP.

documents	
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In case of missing documents, parts of documents and/or signatures, the LA will be awarded 5 working days from the **JS notification** for the completion of the documents.

The purpose of the **quality criteria** is to assess the quality of the eligible project proposals. Quality criteria are closely linked to the specific objectives and results of the DTP CP and are common to all Priority Axes.

This phase will be carried out by the JS, supported by external assessors. The assessment is based on an assessment matrix consisting of the following criteria groups:

- Relevance of the proposal - The main aim is to determine the extent to which the project is in line with the thematic focus of the Programme and of the call for proposals.
- Strategic assessment criteria - The main aim is to determine the extent of project's contribution to the achievement of programme objective(s) and to programme result(s).
- 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 against delivered outputs and result.

Each criteria group (“Relevance”, “Strategic” and “Operational”) is assessed on basis of sub-criteria with each being scored from 0 (not present / missing) to 5 (very good). The score of the main question is an average of the scores of the related guiding questions.

Score	Description
0	None
	The information requested is missing (either not filled it in or not provided in the text).
1	Very poor
	The information is provided but reflects the inexistence of a requirement.
2	Poor
3	Fair
4	Good

	outlined details
5	Very Good
	The information provided is outstanding in its details, clearness and coherence

To determine if the project is relevant for the programme and in line with the provisions set in the call announcement, the *relevance assessment* is carried out first and independently from the *strategic assessment*. Only projects successfully passing the *relevance assessment* are assessed strategically. By the same logic, only projects successfully passing the *strategic assessment* are assessed operationally. **The knock-out threshold for both the relevance and strategic assessment is set at 60%.**

The following procedure applies:

- If a proposal receives a lower score than 60% in the relevance assessment, then it will not be assessed strategically and operationally and it fails the overall assessment.
- If a proposal passes the relevance assessment, but receives less than 60% in the strategic one, then it won't be checked from the operational point of view and it fails the overall assessment.
- If a proposals receives at least 60% both in the relevance and strategic assessment, then it will be assessed also from an operational point of view and the final score will be given by the sum of the scores related to the relevance, strategic and operational assessment, taking into consideration the weight that each criterion provides to the overall points (relevance 10/55= 18% of the total score, strategic 25/55 = 46% of the total score, operational 20/55 = 36% of the total score¹).

In the following tables the sub-criteria to assess the relevance of the proposal, the strategic and operational aspects are illustrated. The sub-criteria are defined using a set of questions with the scope of guiding the assessor through, while performing his/ her evaluation. Due to the complex requirements of transnational projects, these questions cannot be answered in a yes or no manner. The assessor must check to what extent the questions are satisfactorily answered by the applicant and then give an overall assessment score. Guiding questions should be considered binding, as it is binding also the maximum score that can be attributed to single guiding questions.

The criteria for the quality check will contain:

- Two sub-criteria for the relevance of the proposal for a maximum score of 10 points.
- Five sub-criteria for the strategic relevance for a maximum score of 25 points.

¹ The score is calculated by multiplying the single points received by each assessment group to its weight and summing the result of each assessment group: For example if a project received 65% in relevance, 63% in strategic and 59% in operational the final score is calculated as follows: $65 \cdot 0.18 + 63 \cdot 0.46 + 59 \cdot 0.36 = 11.7 + 28.98 + 21.24 = 62\%$

- Four sub-criteria for the organisational relevance for a maximum score of 20 points.

A. Relevance of the proposal

Assessment main question	Guiding questions	Points
<i>Is the project relevant for the Programme?</i>	To what extent is the project in line with the focus of the Programme and of the Call?	5 points
	To what extent is the project intervention logic coherent with the programme one?	
<i>Is the need for transnational cooperation demonstrated?</i>	To what extent does the project have a clear transnational dimension/ impact?	5 points
	To what extent is the added value of the transnational cooperation clearly described?	
Total		10 points

B. Strategic relevance

Assessment main questions	Guiding questions	Points
<i>Are the territorial needs and challenges identified and duly justified?</i>	To what extent are the territorial needs/ challenges coherently described and relevant for achieving the programme objectives?	5 points
	To what extent is the proposal clearly addressing the needs/ challenges?	
	To what extent does the proposal take into consideration the capitalisation of relevant previous projects and the synergies with on-going projects and brings added value to them?	
<i>Is the project intervention logic coherent?</i>	To what extent is the project main objective clearly defined and coherent with the project specific objectives?	5 points
	To what extent are the specific project objectives, activities, outputs and expected result clearly defined and coherent?	
	To what extent are the project outputs and result realistic, well quantified and linked to the needs of the selected target groups?	

<i>To what extent the proposal contributes to an EU strategy or policy?</i>	To what extent is the project concretely contributing to a relevant EU strategy/ policy (other than EUSDR) in the thematic field addressed by the project?	5 points
	To what extent does the project clearly contribute to one or more targets of the selected Priority Area(s), as set out in the Action Plan of the EUSDR?	
	To what extent is the EUSDR embedded in the proposal (at the level of needs and challenges, methodology, synergy/ capitalisation, work plan, durability and transferability)?	
<i>Is the partnership composition relevant, justified and balanced for the proposed project?</i>	To what extent is the partnership representing the right mix of countries, levels of governance and thematic competences/ sectors according to the project topic?	5 points
	To what extent is the partnership balanced and not overly dominated by one / two countries?	
	To what extent is the role of the partners balanced?	
	To what extent can the partners demonstrate that their participation in the project is to the benefit of the territory they represent?	
<i>Is the target group defined and has ownership of the project result?</i>	To what extent is the target group clearly identified, realistically quantified and involved throughout the project implementation (e.g. in the development and/or testing/ of the project outputs, providing feedback to the consortium in relevant aspects etc.)?	5 points
	To what extent does the proposal clearly explain how the target group will integrate/use the project outputs after the end of the project?	
	To what extent is the durability and transferability of the project outputs clearly ensured?	
	To what extent does the project prove to make a positive contribution to the programme's horizontal principles?	
Total		25 points

C. Operational relevance

Assessment main questions	Guiding questions	Points
<i>Is the work plan</i>	To what extent is the proposed timetable coherent and	5 points

<i>realistic, consistent and coherent?</i>	realistic?	
	To what extent are the planned activities, outputs, deliverables and result coherent with the overall methodology?	
	To what extent are the activities logically linked, described in detail (how, where, when and by whom they will be undertaken) and balanced in terms of geographical implementation (national, regional, local)?	
<i>To what extent are management structures and procedures in line with the project size, duration and needs?</i>	To what extent are the management structures (e.g. project steering committee) and procedures clear, transparent, efficient and effective?	5 points
	To what extent does the partnership ensure proper dissemination of information and knowledge transfer between the partners?	
	To what extent is the quality management of the project clearly described and effective?	
	To what extent has the lead applicant demonstrated that it has capacity to manage EU co-financed projects or other international projects or can ensure adequate measures for management support?	
<i>To what extent are communication activities appropriate and forceful to reach the relevant target groups and stakeholders?</i>	To what extent are the communication activities clearly linked to the project specific objectives?	5 points
	To what extent is the chosen approach appropriate to reach the specific objectives of the project?	
	To what extent are communication activities and deliverables appropriate to reach the relevant target groups and stakeholders?	
<i>Does the project budget demonstrate value for money?</i>	To what extent is the budget allocated to each content related activity justified and correctly quantified?	5 points
	To what extent is the budget of each BL coherent with the planned activities and involved partners?	
	To what extent is the spending forecast realistic and correctly timed?	
	To what extent is the budget allocated to project management and communication justified?	
Total		20 points

The overall score will be calculated as the sum of the scores related to the relevance, strategic and operational assessment, taking into consideration the points that each criterion provides to the overall points (relevance 10/55= 18% of the total score, strategic 25/55 = 46% of the total score, operational 20/55 = 36% of the total score). The score is calculated by multiplying the single points received by each assessment group to its weight and summing the result of each assessment group: For example if a project received 65% in relevance, 63% in strategic and 59% in operational the final score is calculated as follows: $65 \times 0.18 + 63 \times 0.46 + 59 \times 0.36 = 11.7 + 28.98 + 21.24 = 62\%$

Project proposals scoring overall 75% or more will be recommended by the JS for immediate selection.

Project proposals scoring overall between 60% and 74% will be subject to further discussions and a final decision will be taken by the MC. The final decision on financing the proposals will be taken by the MC based on the results of the technical assessment coordinated by the JS and on the available amounts per Specific Objective. The final MC decision might take into consideration the number of projects contributing to each output indicator.

Project proposals scoring less than 60% will be recommended by the JS for rejection.

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 process².

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 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.

2. The right to complain against a decision regarding the project selection applies to the Lead Applicant whose project application 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
 - 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