

Interreg Baltic Sea Region 1st Call for Applications Priorities 1-3

Announcement Note for Step 1: Concept Note¹

Timeline: 2 December 2014 - 2 February 2015

1. Introduction

Interreg Baltic Sea Region is launching its first call for applications for its priorities 1-3. The Programme offers financial support to transnational projects contributing to the development of a more innovative, better accessible and sustainable Baltic Sea Region. The programme has been designed under the territorial cooperation goal of the European Union. In practice, the programme combines financing from the EU structural funds - European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Norwegian National Funding as well as the EU external funds - European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI)².

2. Objectives and Priorities

The programme promotes transnational cooperation and integration by projects addressing common key challenges and opportunities of the region. The programme exploits opportunities and addresses issues which cannot sufficiently be dealt with by single countries but require a joint response by partners from several countries from the Baltic Sea Region.

The programme is divided into three thematic priority axes addressing transnational key challenges and opportunities of the Baltic Sea Region:

1. Capacity for innovation

The priority is dedicated to actions strengthening the ability of the Baltic Sea Region to create and commercialise innovation. Thus, the programme encourages experimentation with new approaches and solutions to be practically tested through pilot actions. Furthermore, the priority aims at increasing the capacity of public sector as an innovation driver and enhancing innovation uptake by SMEs. Thematically, one of the priority's focuses lies on utilisation of the potentials of existing and planned research and innovation infrastructures. Additionally, the priority supports capacity-building for smart specialisation strategies and their implementation, e.g. through test and pilot activities. Finally, the priority provides support for non-technological innovation.

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¹ This document was endorsed by the Joint Programming Committee on 25 November 2014. However, please note that it is still subject to final approval by the Monitoring Committee to be established within three months of the date of notification of the European Commission decision adopting the Cooperation Programme.

² ENI financing for Belarus and Russia is subject to the conclusion of the Financing Agreements with the governments of these countries.

2. Efficient management of natural resources

The priority supports transnational cooperation enhancing capacity of public authorities and practitioners to ensure better environmental status of the Baltic Sea Region waters and to strengthen the resource-efficient growth. It will help developing integrated approaches to reducing nutrient loads and decreasing discharges of hazardous substances in the waters. Moreover, the priority supports development and testing of governance and funding models as well as technological solutions for production and distribution of renewable energy and for improved energy efficiency. Finally, it aims at strengthening the sustainable and resource-efficient blue growth in the BSR.

3. Sustainable transport

The priority covers capacity building measures ensuring more sustainable transport solutions in the region. In particular, it aims at better connecting the secondary and tertiary transport networks and nodes in the Baltic Sea Region to core transport networks. Furthermore, the priority targets at improved accessibility of distant areas that have accessibility deficits to urban, administrative and economic centres as well as areas affected by demographic change. Due to the significance of maritime transport for the region the priority also focuses on the improvement of maritime safety and environmental-friendly shipping. Finally, the priority specifically focuses on urban areas of the Baltic Sea Region with the aim of increasing environmentally friendly mobility.

A detailed description of the actions to be financed under each of the priorities can be found in the Cooperation Programme.

3. EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

Interreg Baltic Sea Region takes an active part in the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) and its Action Plan. The funding for implementing the Action Plan should be drawn from a variety of funding sources including the territorial cooperation programmes in the area. The applicants are encouraged to get acquainted with the Action Plan and to consider the possible contribution of their project to a priority area or a horizontal action of the Strategy.

The programme encourages particularly current and possible future flagship projects of the Action Plan thematically fitting to the programme to apply. The coordinators of the priority areas and horizontal actions of the Strategy together with their steering groups are responsible for selection of flagship projects and issuing a "letter of commitment" to be submitted together with the concept note. In case there are several concept notes demonstrating the same value according to the quality assessment criteria of the programme the priority in the selection of projects for programme funding will be given to the flagship project.

For more information on the Strategy please go to: <http://www.balticsea-region-strategy.eu/>.

4. Availability of funds

The total programme co-financing from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for priorities 1-3 amounts to 234.8 million euros. Norway allocates 5.5 million euros national funding to the programme for Norwegian project partners. The amount of co-financing transferred to the programme from the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) for the participation of partners from Belarus and Russia is 8.8 million euros. This amount cannot be released, however, before the Financing Agreements between the

governments of these countries and the European Union are signed. The programme co-financing will be committed to projects in several calls for applications.

The programme co-financing allocated to priorities 1-3 is shown in the table below:

| Priority | ERDF (in MEUR) | Norwegian funds (in MEUR) ³ |
|--|-------------------|--|
| 1. Capacity for innovation | 84.4 | 5.5 |
| 2. Efficient management of natural resources | 84.4 | |
| 3. Sustainable transport | 66.0 | |

5. Project partnership

In general, public authorities at local, regional or national level, research and training organisations, NGOs, sectoral agencies and associations as well as private-for-profit organisations from the programme area are invited to apply. The Programme Manual specifies which legal entities can act as the lead partners and project partners. Organisations not falling under these legal requirements may participate in the projects as associated organisations.

The Interreg Baltic Sea Region area covers eleven countries. It comprises eight EU Member States (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, parts of Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Sweden) and three partner countries (Belarus, Norway, parts of Russia). The detailed geographical coverage of the programme is defined in the Cooperation Programme.

As a general rule, project partners can only receive co-financing from the programme provided that they are located in the regions belonging to the programme area. However, in exceptional cases partners located outside the programme area can join the project partnerships. The detailed requirements concerning this issue are presented in the Programme Manual.

Each project has to involve at least three project partners from three different countries of the programme area: a lead partner and at least two project partners. Lead partners must be located in the territory of a Member State in the programme area or in Norway. At least one of the partners has to be located in the territory of an EU member state in the programme area.

Specific implementing provisions for participation of Belarus and Russia are under discussion. Organisations from these countries can receive funding only after final agreements are reached. However, it is encouraged to include partners from these countries as associated organisations.

The core partnership needs to be in place at the 1 step (concept note) of the call for applications. The partnerships can be adjusted and additional partners can be added between the step 1 and step 2 of the call. Further details on the composition of the project partnership can be found in the Programme Manual.

³ For Norwegian funds there is no binding allocation among priorities. Some of the funding is dedicated to actions supported under Priority 4 of the programme.

6. Lead partner principle

Each project has to appoint a lead applicant/lead partner who is responsible for preparation and submission of the application form. In case of approval of the project, the lead partner takes over the full responsibility for management, communication, implementation, and co-ordination of activities among the involved partners. The lead partner bears legal responsibility for the whole partnership. The lead partner is also the link between the project and the Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat (MA/JS) of the Programme.

7. Duration of projects

The project duration consists of three phases: a contracting phase, an implementation phase and a project closure phase. The contracting phase lasts two months and starts at the day after the MC decision. The duration of the implementation phase may vary from 18 up to 36 months. The closure phase lasts three months.

8. Co-financing rates

Project partners have to provide own contribution to receive programme co-financing. The level of these contributions varies between the countries and the funds used. Partners from Denmark, Finland, Germany and Sweden are entitled to receive 75% ERDF co-financing, while partners from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland are entitled to 85% ERDF co-financing. Norwegian partners will receive 50% co-financing from Norwegian national funding. Funding modalities for partners from Belarus and Russia will be defined later.

9. Two-step selection procedure

The programme allocates its funding to projects through calls for applications. The projects are selected for funding in a **two-step application procedure**. In **step 1** all lead applicants are asked to submit a **concept note** – outlining briefly the project. In **step 2** only the applicants pre-selected in the step 1 are invited to submit **complete project applications**.

In step 1 the applicants are asked to fill in the concept note form. The form is part of the application package and is available for download on the programme website: interreg-baltic.eu. The concept note has to be submitted in electronic (pdf) version not later than **2 February 2015**. No additional supporting documents are to be delivered at this stage. The only exceptions are projects applying as a flagship of the Action Plan to the EUSBSR. These projects are asked to submit a letter of commitment from the relevant Priority Area Coordinator or Horizontal Action Leader together with the electronic version of the concept note.

The MA/JS will verify the completeness and correctness of the submitted documents and perform a content-wise assessment. The assessment criteria are presented in the Programme Manual. The Monitoring Committee (MC) of the Programme will take the decision on the concept notes to be further developed into complete project applications. Only the selected applicants will be invited to take part in the step 2 of the call for applications.

The applicants invited to take part in step 2 will be informed about the dates to deliver the finalised digital and paper project applications in the approval letter sent after step 1. The submission date for the full applications will be approximately two and half months

after receiving notification about approval of the concept note. The complete project applications consists of the application form and required attachments (partner declarations for each participating organisation) as well as non-obligatory enclosures (e.g. letters of support from the associated organisations if relevant). After the assessment carried out by the MA/JS, the MC will decide on the applications most likely in late 2015.

The table below summarises information about documents that applicants need to submit at each stage of the call for applications:

| Step 1 Concept note | | |
|---|--|--|
| | Digital version | |
| Which documents? | Concept note form in a pdf format Signed and scanned Lead partner confirmation (section 7 of the concept note form) Optional: Scanned letters of commitment from relevant Priority Area Coordinator/Horizontal Action Leader | |
| When? | By 2 February 2015 | |
| How? | Via email: application@interreg-baltic.eu | |
| Step 2 Complete project proposal | | |
| | Digital version | Paper version |
| Which documents? | Online application form Scanned partner declarations for all project partners (including lead applicant) Optional: Scanned letters of support from associated organisations | Signed application form Other attachments are NOT to be submitted in paper form |
| When? | By the deadline indicated in the approval letter received after step 1 | By the deadline indicated in the approval letter received after step 1 !!! The date on the post stamp must be the date of the deadline or earlier !!! |
| How? | Via online submission system | Interreg Baltic Sea Region Joint Secretariat/ Managing Authority IB.SH Grubenstrasse 20 18055 Rostock, Germany |

10. Reimbursement of preparation costs

Project partners eligible for ERDF or Norwegian national funding can apply for reimbursement of costs related to the preparation of the project proposal. Only projects approved by the MC in step 2 of the call can have their preparation costs reimbursed. The reimbursement of preparation costs is lump sum based. Projects having received seed money funds from the EUSBSR Seed Money Facility or any other EU funds for the preparation of the same project will not be eligible to receive reimbursement of preparation costs. Further details can be found in the Programme Manual.

11. Programme language

The official language of the programme is English. Therefore, all communication between applicants and the MA/JS is carried out in English. Information in concept notes, application forms as well as official correspondence must be treated accordingly.

12. Further information and assistance

The official programme documents:

- Interreg Baltic Sea Region Cooperation Programme;
- Programme Manual;
- Application package including the announcement of the call, concept note form and partner declaration form are available on the Programme website interreg-baltic.eu.

The programme provides tools (project idea and partner search tool at LinkedIn) and organises events (lead applicant seminars) to facilitate the generation of project concept notes and to support applicants in the project development process.

Furthermore, the MA/JS provides written feedback to project ideas and offers consultations in its offices (Rostock/Riga), during events, and via telephone.

For general advice on the Programme matters please contact: info@interreg-baltic.eu.