



Preparatory Action

Call for proposals document

Increasing access to educational tools in areas and communities with low connectivity or access to technologies

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CALL FOR PROPOSALS

PREPARATORY ACTION:

Increasing access to educational tools in areas and communities with low connectivity or access to technologies

1. INTRODUCTION – BACKGROUND

The European Commission adopted on 04.05.2021 the work programme for 2021 and the financing of Pilot Projects and Preparatory Actions in the field of "Communications Networks, Content and Technology"¹.

This preparatory action is part of the 2021 work programme and will support the digital transformation of the education sector at European level by reducing the **digital gap** suffered by pupils from **remote areas** and **communities** with low **connectivity**, limited or no access to **devices** and digital educational **tools** and **content**. By doing so, it will support the first strategic priority of the **Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027**², namely to the development a high-performing digital education ecosystem and in particular, the Strategic Dialogue on enabling factors in digital education. Moreover, the preparatory action will also contribute to the wider objectives of the **European Digital Education Hub**, a flagship action of the Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027.

The **Covid-19 crisis** resulted in one of the greatest challenges education and training systems have faced in the last decades. Access to and quality of the learning experience varied greatly, demonstrating that a higher level of **pre-existing digital capacity** led to faster and more effective responses. Many schools, particularly those located in remote areas, faced severe challenges with the switch to **distance and online learning**, due to their low prior level of digital readiness. Many of their teachers lacked the relevant **digital competences** to properly teach remotely and many pupils living in remote areas lacked the proper **infrastructure** including **connectivity** and access to **digital devices, tools and content** at home.

Therefore, the loss of learning opportunities was felt strongly by those that have already suffered a **disadvantage** before the crisis (e.g. pupils such as those living in remote areas like mountain areas, rural areas, islands or deltas, etc.) as they were **strongly impacted** by the crisis. New challenges arose from the social isolation conditions, resulting in a greater mental health burden, often related to the new learning routine or the increased academic stress. Younger pupils are particularly affected by the learning loss, usually

¹ C(2021)3006 final

² COM/2020/624 final

needing more assistance in the educational instruction than older pupils or university students.

This is extremely worrying as inequalities that are often rooted in childhood often become more pronounced in later life. This calls for reinforced actions to ensure **inclusion** is a leading priority in education and training, granting the right to education for all.

2. OBJECTIVE(S) – THEME(S) – PRIORITIES

This action aims at addressing **inequalities** of access to digital education by enhancing **inclusion** and by reducing the **digital gap** suffered by pupils from **remote areas** and **communities** with low **connectivity**, limited or no access to **devices** and **digital educational tools** and **content**.

This action aims at developing a **strategy** designed to increase access to digital education in the EU remote areas and communities that mostly need such support.

The action will also run deployment actions in primary, secondary and vocational schools in order to **implement** and **test** some of the most suitable technical solutions to reduce the digital gap suffered by pupils from remote areas and communities. These deployment actions will be accompanied by targeted educational consultation and training services for schools and teachers.

More precisely, the action is expected to produce the following results:

- To gain **insights** and **understanding** related to the access and use of, and attitudes and needs towards the use of digital technologies in education by surveying head teachers, teachers, ICT coordinators, pupils and parents covering as many schools located in remote areas of as many EU Member States as possible. This should be done by collecting comprehensive and high-value up-to-date and reusable data to mainly explore lessons learned during and after the Covid-19 pandemic well as to empirically validate the areas of necessary investment needs;
- To strengthen the dialogue between all relevant **actors**, including school principals, teachers, ICT coordinators, pupils, parents, technology providers, policy-makers, universities and research organisations, experts and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with the aim to **exchange and analyse best practices and successful applications** of how to increase **access** to digital educational solutions with a **focus on schools located in remote areas**.
- To support schools with targeted educational **consultation** and **training** services ahead and during the take-up of deployment pilots (see next bullet point). The services are designed to support schools located in remote areas with aspects of self-evaluation (e.g. using the SELFIE self-reflection tool for schools) and school improvement in order to successfully plan, choose and implement the best digital technology solutions for the inclusivity of their pupils.
- To run **deployment pilots to allow primary, secondary and vocational schools** to benefit from the most suitable technical solutions to reduce the digital gap suffered by pupils from areas and communities with low connectivity, limited or

no access to devices and digital educational tools and content. This will be done through a financial support to third parties (FSTP) mechanism applying a fair and transparent selection process via open calls. At least 50% of the budget is expected to be dedicated to financial support to third parties (FSTP) and the maximum amount of FSTP, distributed through a grant, is EUR 20.000 per third party for the entire action duration but smaller amounts may also be justified.

- To accompany the deployment pilots by running **training programmes** to enhance teachers’ digital competences regarding the use of the newly implemented digital devices and digital educational tools and content as well as regarding the development of innovative pedagogies.
- To develop a **strategy** based on the insight gained by the collected data, the various dialogues with stakeholders and running the deployment pilots, with regard to how to increase access to digital education in remote areas and communities with low connectivity, limited or no access to devices and digital educational tools and content throughout the EU. The strategy should result in the publication of ready-to-use guidelines and standards.

The action should reach a large number of EU Member States and as many **EU primary, secondary and vocational schools** located in different types of remote areas as possible.

3. TIMETABLE

	Steps	Date and time or indicative period
(a)	Publication of the call	06/05/2021
(b)	Deadline for submitting applications	15/07/2021 by 17.00 CET
(c)	Evaluation period	August – October 2021
(d)	Information to applicants	October 2021
(e)	Signature of grant agreement	December 2021

4. BUDGET AVAILABLE

The total budget earmarked for the co-financing of projects under this call for proposals is estimated at EUR 2 370 000.

The EU co-financing is limited to a maximum co-funding rate of 90 % of the total eligible costs.

The maximum grant will be EUR 2 370 000.

The Commission expects to fund 1 proposal.

The Commission reserves the right not to distribute all the funds available.

5. ADMISSIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

In order to be admissible, applications must be:

- sent no later than the deadline for submitting applications referred to in section 3;
- submitted through an electronic submission system available at <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/home>; and
- drafted in one of the EU official languages³.

Failure to comply with those requirements will lead to rejection of the application.

Please note: Due to technical constraints, some of the forms used in the submission system are standard forms for Horizon 2020 (H2020) actions. Nevertheless, this Preparatory action is not a H2020 action and any reference to H2020 in the forms or in the templates must be disregarded. The only reference document is this Call document and the related Commission Decision C(2021)3006 of 04.05.2021.

6. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

6.1. Eligible applicants

Type of applicants targeted by the call for proposals:

- Public authorities;
- Educational institutions including higher educational establishment;
- Industry including small and medium enterprises (SMEs);
- Research centres;
- Non-profit organisations (NGOs);
- Other actors.

Affiliated entities

Entities affiliated⁴ to the applicants are not eligible to receive funding under this Call for proposals.

Country of establishment

Only applications from legal entities established in the following countries are eligible:

- EU Member States;
- EFTA and EEA countries: Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland.

Multi-beneficiary/Consortium requirements

- In order to be eligible, a proposal must be submitted by a consortium composed of at least 3 legal entities; and
- from 3 different eligible countries.

³ https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/eu-languages_en

⁴ In accordance with Article 187 FR, entities that satisfy the eligibility criteria and that do not fall within one of the situations referred to in Articles 136(1) and 141(1) FR and that have a link with the applicant, in particular a legal or capital link, which is neither limited to the action nor established for the sole purpose of its implementation, will be considered as entities affiliated to the applicant.

Supporting documents

In order to assess the applicants' eligibility, the following supporting documents are requested:

- **private entity:** extract from the official journal, copy of articles of association, extract of trade or association register, certificate of liability to VAT (if, as in certain countries, the trade register number and VAT number are identical, only one of these documents is required);
- **public entity:** copy of the resolution, decision or other official document establishing the public-law entity;
- **natural persons:** photocopy of identity card and/or passport; certificate of liability to VAT, if applicable (e.g. some self-employed persons)
- **entities without legal personality:** documents providing evidence that their representative(s) have the capacity to undertake legal obligations on their behalf.

Before submitting a project proposal, all organisations involved in the proposal must first be registered in the Funding & Tenders Portal Participant Register and have their 9-digit Participant Identification Code (PIC number).

In case applicants are already registered in the EC system (Participant Register) and possess a validated PIC number, it is sufficient to provide only the corresponding PIC number in the application form Part A (supporting document already uploaded in the Register).

In case of not validated PIC number, please provide the supporting documents directly in the Participant Register or as attachment part B (uploaded under Annexes (If applicable, Supporting documents, Call document section 6.1)).

6.2. Eligible activities

The following types of activities are eligible under this call for proposals:

- Consultation and training services and activities;
- Deployment pilots providing financial support to third parties (see point 11.7.d);
- Studies, analyses, surveys;
- High-level events, awareness raising and communication activities;
- Actions aiming at community building and exchange of good practices;
- Project website putting together best practice examples;
- Preparation and publishing of ready-to-use guidelines and standards;
- Awareness and dissemination actions.

Implementation period

- the maximum duration of the project is 24 months.

Applications for projects scheduled to run for a longer period than that specified in this call for proposals will not be accepted.

7. EXCLUSION CRITERIA

7.1. Exclusion

The authorising officer shall exclude an applicant from participating in call for proposals procedures where:

- (a) the applicant is bankrupt, subject to insolvency or winding-up procedures, its assets are being administered by a liquidator or by a court, it is in an arrangement with creditors, its business activities are suspended, or it is in any analogous situation arising from a similar procedure provided for under EU or national laws or regulations;
- (b) it has been established by a final judgment or a final administrative decision that the applicant is in breach of its obligations relating to the payment of taxes or social security contributions in accordance with the applicable law;
- (c) it has been established by a final judgment or a final administrative decision that the applicant is guilty of grave professional misconduct by having violated applicable laws or regulations or ethical standards of the profession to which the applicant belongs, or by having engaged in any wrongful intent or gross negligence, including, in particular, any of the following:
 - (i) fraudulently or negligently misrepresenting information required for the verification of the absence of grounds for exclusion or the fulfilment of eligibility or selection criteria or in the performance of a contract, a grant agreement or a grant decision;
 - (ii) entering into agreement with other applicants with the aim of distorting competition;
 - (iii) violating intellectual property rights;
 - (iv) attempting to influence the decision-making process of the Commission during the award procedure;
 - (v) attempting to obtain confidential information that may confer upon it undue advantages in the award procedure;
- (d) it has been established by a final judgment that the applicant is guilty of any of the following:
 - (i) fraud, within the meaning of Article 3 of Directive (EU) 2017/1371 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Article 1 of the Convention on the protection of the European Communities' financial interests, drawn up by the Council Act of 26 July 1995;
 - (ii) corruption, as defined in Article 4(2) of Directive (EU) 2017/1371 or Article 3 of the Convention on the fight against corruption involving officials of the European Communities or officials of Member States of the European Union, drawn up by the Council Act of 26 May 1997, or conduct referred to in Article 2(1) of Council Framework Decision 2003/568/JHA, or corruption as defined in the applicable law;
 - (iii) conduct related to a criminal organisation, as referred to in Article 2 of Council Framework Decision 2008/841/JHA;
 - (iv) money laundering or terrorist financing within the meaning of Article 1(3), (4) and (5) of Directive (EU) 2015/849 of the European Parliament and of the Council;

- (v) terrorist offences or offences linked to terrorist activities, as defined in Articles 1 and 3 of Council Framework Decision 2002/475/JHA, respectively, or inciting, aiding, abetting or attempting to commit such offences, as referred to in Article 4 of that Decision;
 - (vi) child labour or other offences concerning trafficking in human beings as referred to in Article 2 of Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council;
- (e) the applicant has shown significant deficiencies in complying with main obligations in the performance of a contract, a grant agreement or a grant decision financed by the Union's budget, which has led to its early termination or to the application of liquidated damages or other contractual penalties, or which has been discovered following checks, audits or investigations by an authorising officer, OLAF or the Court of Auditors;
 - (f) it has been established by a final judgment or final administrative decision that the applicant has committed an irregularity within the meaning of Article 1(2) of Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 2988/95;
 - (g) It has been established by a final judgement or final administrative decision that the applicant has created an entity in a different jurisdiction with the intent to circumvent fiscal, social or any other legal obligations of mandatory application in the jurisdiction of its registered office, central administration or principal place of business;
 - (h) it has been established by a final judgement or final administrative decision that an entity has been created with the intent referred to in point (g);
 - (i) for the situations referred to in points (c) to (h) above, the applicant is subject to:
 - (i) facts established in the context of audits or investigations carried out by European Public Prosecutor's Office after its establishment, the Court of Auditors, the European Anti-Fraud Office or the internal auditor, or any other check, audit or control performed under the responsibility of an authorising officer of an EU institution, of a European office or of an EU agency or body;
 - (ii) non-final judgments or non-final administrative decisions which may include disciplinary measures taken by the competent supervisory body responsible for the verification of the application of standards of professional ethics;
 - (iii) facts referred to in decisions of persons or entities being entrusted with EU budget implementation tasks;
 - (iv) information transmitted by Member States implementing Union funds;
 - (v) decisions of the Commission relating to the infringement of Union competition law or of a national competent authority relating to the infringement of Union or national competition law; or
 - (vi) decisions of exclusion by an authorising officer of an EU institution, of a European office or of an EU agency or body.

7.2. Remedial measures

If an applicant declares one of the situations of exclusion listed above (see section 7.1), it must indicate the measures it has taken to remedy the exclusion situation, thus demonstrating its reliability. This may include e.g. technical, organisational and personnel measures to correct the conduct and prevent further occurrence, compensation of damage or payment of fines or of any taxes or social security contributions. The

relevant documentary evidence which illustrates the remedial measures taken must be provided in annex to the declaration. This does not apply for situations referred in point (d) of section 7.1.

7.3. Rejection from the call for proposals

The authorising officer shall not award a grant to an applicant who:

- (a) is in an exclusion situation established in accordance with section 7.1; or
- (b) has misrepresented the information required as a condition for participating in the procedure or has failed to supply that information; or
- (c) was previously involved in the preparation of documents used in the award procedure where this entails a breach of the principle of equal treatment, including distortion of competition, that cannot be remedied otherwise.

Administrative sanctions (exclusion) may be imposed on applicants, where applicable, if any of the declarations or information provided as a condition for participating in this procedure prove to be false.

7.4. Supporting documents

Applicants must provide an original “blue ink” or “qualified electronic” signed⁵ declaration on their honour⁶ certifying that they are not in one of the situations referred to in Articles 136(1) and 141 FR, by filling in the relevant form attached to the application form accompanying the call for proposals and available in the submission system.

Signed and scanned or eSigned Declaration(s) on their honour have to be provided as attachment part B (uploaded under Annexes (Declaration(s) on their honour, Call document section 7.4)).

Regarding the use of eSignature, only eSignatures from the EU Trusted List of Trust Service Providers: <https://esignature.ec.europa.eu/efda/tl-browser/#/screen/home> will be accepted.

This obligation may be fulfilled in one of the following ways:

– *for multi-beneficiary grants*⁷:

- (i) the coordinator of a consortium signs a declaration on behalf of all applicants; OR
- (ii) each applicant in the consortium signs a declaration in its name;

⁵ A hand-written “blue ink” signature or a “qualified electronic” signature (QES) within the meaning of Regulation (EU) No 910/2014 (eIDAS Regulation) is mandatory. While scans of the “blue ink” signature suffice for the submission of proposals, the original “blue ink” versions must be provided before any grant agreement can be signed by the Commission.

⁶ To be signed by the legal representative of the company in the name of the authorized person with the legal power to represent, and enter into binding obligations on behalf of, the entity s/he represents in accordance with the law or the articles of association of the company.

⁷ A combination of the options is also possible as long as all participating entities are covered.

8. SELECTION CRITERIA

8.1. Financial capacity

At the application submission stage, the applicants are requested to provide only the financial capacity data by filling in the provided table in Part B, under section 4.1. Participants (applicants). In case of reasonable doubts, on the basis of available information, on the financial capacity of individual applicant of the proposal, the Commission may request supporting financial documents stated below from the applicants at any time during the evaluation process.

Financial supporting documents stated below will be requested at the Grant preparation stage from the applicants from the selected proposal.

Applicants must have stable and sufficient sources of funding to maintain their activity throughout the duration of the grant and to participate in its funding. The applicants' financial capacity will be assessed on the basis of the following supporting documents to be submitted with the application:

- a) Low value grants (\leq EUR 60 000):
 - a declaration on their honour.
- b) Grants $>$ EUR 60 000:
 - a declaration on their honour, and
 - the profit and loss account as well as the balance sheet for the last two financial years for which the accounts were closed;
 - for newly created entities: the business plan might replace the above documents;
- c) Grants for an action $>$ EUR 750 000:
 - (i) the information and supporting documents mentioned in point b) above, and
 - (ii) **an audit report** produced by an approved external auditor certifying the accounts for the last two years available, where such an audit report is available or whenever a statutory report is required by law.

If the audit report is not available AND a statutory report is not required by law, a self-declaration signed by the applicant's authorised representative certifying the validity of its accounts for the last two financial years available must be provided.

In the event of an application grouping several applicants (consortium), the above thresholds apply to each applicant.

On the basis of the documents submitted, if the Commission considers that financial capacity is weak, s/he may:

- request further information;
- decide not to give pre-financing or reduce the pre-financing to the applicant;
- decide to give pre-financing paid in instalments;
- decide to give pre-financing covered by a bank guarantee (see section 11.6.2 below);

- where applicable, require the joint and several financial liability of all the co-beneficiaries.
- decide to reject the participation of the applicant in the proposal and request reallocation of the tasks to another applicant of the consortium or his replacement without compromising the quality of the proposal.

If the RAO considered that the financial capacity is insufficient s/he will reject the application.

8.2. Operational capacity

Applicants must have the professional competencies as well as appropriate qualifications necessary to complete the proposed action. In this respect, applicants have to submit a declaration on their honour, and the following supporting documents:

- curriculum vitae or description of the profile of the people primarily responsible for managing and implementing the operation (accompanied where appropriate, like in the field of research and education, by a list of relevant publications);
- an exhaustive lists of previous projects and activities performed and connected to the policy field of a given call or to the actions to be carried out;
- a description of the technical equipment, tools or facilities and patents at the disposal of the applicant;

9. AWARD CRITERIA

Eligible applications/projects will be assessed on the basis of the following criteria:

Award criterion 1 - Excellence	Max score	Thre shold
<p>The following aspects will be taken into account:</p> <p>Clarity and pertinence of the objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Are the overall and specific objectives of the proposal <i>pertinent</i> (= relevant for the call text)? ○ Are they <i>clear, measurable, ambitious but realistic</i> and <i>achievable</i> within the duration of the project? <p>Soundness of the concept and credibility of the proposed methodology:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Is the overall <i>concept</i> underpinning the project well described and explained? ○ Is the overall <i>methodology</i> (the way of getting from idea / concept to actual results) credible and realistic? ○ Are the requirements set out in point 11.7.d of the Call document (Financial support to third parties) well described and in line with the call objectives? 	30	18
Award criterion 2 - Impact		

<p>The following aspects will be taken into account:</p> <p>The extent to which the outputs of the project would contribute to each of the expected results listed in the section 2 of this document:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For every expected result listed in this call, does the proposal fully/partially meet them? <p>The quality of the proposed measures to exploit and disseminate and communicate about the project results and the quality of the management of research data, where relevant:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Is a draft ‘plan for the dissemination and exploitation of the project's results’ provided? ○ Are the measures proportionate to the scale of the project? ○ Are the proposed communication measures for promoting the project and its findings well described (adequate to project scale, clear objectives, tailored to the needs of different target audiences)? ○ Are the measures to manage the research data generated and/or collected during the project well described and of high quality? <p>How is the European dimension, resulting in a wide geographical coverage of the proposal, addressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How many Member States are covered in the proposal? How many and what types of educational stakeholders are involved in the different actions of the proposal? How many primary, secondary and vocational schools located in remote areas are reached with this proposal? 	40	24
Award criterion 3 - Implementation		
<p>The following aspects will be taken into account:</p> <p>Quality and effectiveness of the work plan, including extent to which resources assigned to work packages are in line with their objectives and deliverables:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Is the work plan (work packages, tasks, deliverables, milestones and timing) appropriate to reach the projects’ objectives and impacts? ○ Is the estimated overall budget suitable in terms of objectives/output and are resources assigned to WPs in in line with their objectives and deliverables? <p>Appropriateness of the management structures and procedures, including risk and innovation management:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Are the organisational structure and decision-making well described? ○ Are the management structures and the decision making mechanisms appropriate to the complexity and scale of the project, particularly regarding the management of the financial support to third parties? ○ Are critical (and relevant) risks identified, relating to project implementation and achievement of proposals objectives? Are 	30	18

<p>the mitigating measures appropriate?</p> <p>Complementarity of the participants and extent to which the consortium as whole brings together the necessary expertise:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How will the consortium match the proposal’s objectives, and bring together the necessary expertise? How do the members complement one another? <p>Appropriateness of the allocation of tasks, ensuring that all participants have a valid role</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Is the role of each consortium member clear? <p>Does each consortium member have adequate (or too much/little) resources to carry out their assigned tasks?</p>		
Total	100	60

Minimum score per criterion (threshold):

Proposals scoring less than 60% of the maximum score for any technical award criterion will be considered of insufficient quality and rejected.

Minimum total score (threshold):

Proposals with a total score of less than 60 points at the end of the evaluation process will be considered of insufficient quality and rejected.

10. LEGAL COMMITMENTS

In the event of a grant awarded by the Commission, a grant agreement, drawn up in euro and detailing the conditions and level of funding, will be sent to the applicant, as well as the information on the procedure to formalise the agreement of the parties.

Two copies of the original agreement must be signed first by the coordinator on behalf of the consortium and returned to the Commission immediately. The Commission will sign it last.

The applicants understand that submission of a grant application implies acceptance of the general conditions attached to this call for proposals in Annex II to the model grant agreement. These general conditions bind the beneficiaries to whom the grant is awarded and shall constitute an annex to the grant agreement.

11. FINANCIAL PROVISIONS

11.1. Form of the grant

11.1.1 Reimbursement of costs actually incurred

The grant will be defined by applying a maximum co-financing rate of 90 % to the eligible costs actually incurred and declared by the beneficiary.

Eligible costs must be declared under the following forms ('forms of costs'):

- (a) for direct personnel costs: as actually incurred costs ('actual costs');
- (b) for direct costs of subcontracting: as actually incurred costs (actual costs);
- (c) for direct costs of providing financial support to third parties: as actually incurred costs (actual costs) or see section 11.1.2;
- (d) for other direct costs: as actually incurred costs (actual costs);
- (e) for indirect costs: on the basis of a flat-rate applied (maximum 7 % of the eligible direct costs, excluding direct costs of subcontracting, and direct costs of financial support to third parties).

For details on eligibility of costs, please refer to section 11.2.

11.1.2 Reimbursement of eligible costs declared on the basis of lump sums and/or flat-rate(s) – only applicable as a form of Financial support to third parties

The payment scheme for the Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) is up to the applicants to decide and can take among others also a form of lump sums and/or flat-rate(s). See point 11.7.d.

The grant (FSTP) will be defined by applying a maximum co-financing rate of up to 100% to the eligible costs declared by the beneficiary on the basis of:

- (a) a lump sum of a maximum of EUR 20 000 ('reimbursement of lump sum costs') for the following categories of costs: see point 11.7.d.

The lump sum will be paid provided the above activities were properly implemented;

- (b) a flat rate of to maximum 100 % of the eligible direct costs ('reimbursement of flat-rate costs') and a maximum of EUR 20 000 for the following categories of costs: see point 11.7.d.

The flat rate will be paid following acceptance of the costs to which the flat rate is to be applied.

11.2. Eligible costs

Eligible costs shall meet all the following criteria:

- they are incurred by the beneficiary.
- they are incurred during the duration of the action, with the exception of costs relating to final reports and audit certificates;
 - The period of eligibility of costs will start as specified in the grant agreement.
 - If a beneficiary can demonstrate the need to start the action before the agreement is signed, the costs eligibility period may start before that signature. Under no circumstances can the eligibility period start before the date of submission of the grant application.
- they are indicated in the estimated budget of the action;
- they are necessary for the implementation of the action which is the subject of the grant;

- they are identifiable and verifiable, in particular being recorded in the accounting records of the beneficiary and determined according to the applicable accounting standards of the country where the beneficiary is established and according to the usual cost accounting practices of the beneficiary;
- they comply with the requirements of applicable tax and social legislation;
- they are reasonable, justified, and comply with the principle of sound financial management, in particular regarding economy and efficiency.

The beneficiary's internal accounting and auditing procedures must permit direct reconciliation of the costs and revenue declared in respect of the action/project with the corresponding accounting statements and supporting documents.

Eligible costs may be direct or indirect.

11.2.1. Eligible direct costs

The eligible direct costs for the action are those costs which:

with due regard to the conditions of eligibility set out above, are identifiable as specific costs directly linked to the performance of the action and which can therefore be booked to it directly, such as :

- (a) *the costs of personnel working under an employment contract with the beneficiary or an equivalent appointing act and assigned to the action, provided that these costs are in line with the beneficiary's usual policy on remuneration.*

Those costs include actual salaries plus social security contributions and other statutory costs included in the remuneration. They may also comprise additional remunerations, including payments on the basis of supplementary contracts regardless of the nature of those contracts, provided that they are paid in a consistent manner whenever the same kind of work or expertise is required, independently from the source of funding used;

The costs of natural persons working under a contract with the beneficiary other than an employment contract or who are seconded to the beneficiary by a third party against payment may also be included under such personnel costs, provided that the following conditions are fulfilled:

- (i) *the person works under conditions similar to those of an employee (in particular regarding the way the work is organised, the tasks that are performed and the premises where they are performed);*
- (ii) *the result of the work belongs to the beneficiary (unless exceptionally agreed otherwise); and*
- (iii) *the costs are not significantly different from the costs of staff performing similar tasks under an employment contract with the beneficiary;*

The recommended methods for the calculation of direct personnel costs are provided in Appendix.

- (b) *costs of travel and related subsistence allowances, provided that these costs are in line with the beneficiary's usual practices on travel;*

(c) *the depreciation costs of equipment or other assets (new or second-hand) as recorded in the beneficiary's accounting statements, provided that the asset:*

(i) is written off in accordance with the international accounting standards and the beneficiary's usual accounting practices; and

(ii) has been purchased in accordance with the rules on implementation contracts laid down in the grant agreement, if the purchase occurred within the implementation period;

The costs of renting or leasing equipment or other assets are also eligible, provided that these costs do not exceed the depreciation costs of similar equipment or assets and are exclusive of any finance fee;

Only the portion of the equipment's depreciation, rental or lease costs corresponding to the implementation period and the rate of actual use for the purposes of the action may be taken into account when determining the eligible costs. By way of exception, the full cost of purchase of equipment may be eligible under the Special Conditions, if this is justified by the nature of the action and the context of the use of the equipment or assets;

(d) *costs of consumables and supplies, provided that they:*

(i) are purchased in accordance with the rules on implementation contracts laid down in the grant agreement; and

(ii) are directly assigned to the action;

(e) *costs arising directly from requirements imposed by the Agreement (dissemination of information, specific evaluation of the action, audits, translations, reproduction), including the costs of requested financial guarantees, provided that the corresponding services are purchased in accordance with the rules on implementation contracts laid down in the grant agreement;*

(f) *costs derived from subcontracts, provided that specific conditions on subcontracting as laid down in the grant agreement are met;*

(g) *costs of financial support to third parties, provided that the conditions laid down in the grant agreement are met;*

(h) *duties, taxes and charges paid by the beneficiary, notably value added tax (VAT), provided that they are included in eligible direct costs, and unless specified otherwise in the grant agreement.*

11.2.2. Eligible indirect costs (overheads)

Indirect costs are costs that are not directly linked to the action implementation and therefore cannot be attributed directly to it.

A flat-rate amount of 7 % of the total eligible direct costs of the action, is eligible as indirect costs, representing the beneficiary's general administrative costs which can be regarded as chargeable to the action/project.

Excluded from the eligibility of the indirect costs of a flat-rate amount of 7 % of the total eligible direct costs of the action are:

- (a) costs of subcontracting; and
- (b) costs of providing financial support to third parties.

Indirect costs may not include costs entered under another budget heading.

Applicants' attention is drawn to the fact that if they are receiving an operating grant financed by the EU or Euratom budget, they may not declare indirect costs for the period(s) covered by the operating grant, unless they can demonstrate that the operating grant does not cover any costs of the action.

In order to demonstrate this, in principle, the beneficiary should:

- a. use *analytical cost accounting that allows to separate all costs (including overheads)* attributable to the operating grant and the action grant. For that purpose the beneficiary should use *reliable accounting codes and allocation keys* ensuring that *the allocation* of the costs is done in a *fair, objective and realistic way*.
- b. *record separately*:
 - all costs incurred for the operating grants (i.e. personnel, general running costs and other operating costs linked to the part of its usual annual activities), and
 - all costs incurred for the action grants (including the actual indirect costs linked to the action)

If the operating grant covers the entire usual annual activity and budget of the beneficiary, the latter is not entitled to receive any indirect costs under the action grant.

11.3. Ineligible costs

The following items are not considered as eligible costs:

- a) return on capital and dividends paid by a beneficiary;
- b) debt and debt service charges;
- c) provisions for losses or debts;
- d) interest owed;
- e) doubtful debts;
- f) exchange losses;
- g) costs of transfers from the Commission charged by the bank of a beneficiary;
- h) costs declared by the beneficiary under another action receiving a grant financed from the Union budget. Such grants include grants awarded by a Member State and financed from the Union budget and grants awarded by bodies other than the Commission for the purpose of implementing the Union budget. In particular, beneficiaries receiving an operating grant financed by the EU or Euratom budget cannot declare indirect costs for the period(s) covered by the operating grant, unless they can demonstrate that the operating grant does not cover any costs of the action.
- i) contributions in kind from third parties;
- j) excessive or reckless expenditure;
- k) deductible VAT.

11.4. Balanced budget

The estimated budget of the action must be attached to the application form. It must have revenue and expenditure in balance.

The budget must be drawn up in euros.

Applicants for whom costs will not be incurred in euros should use the exchange rate published on the Infor-euro website available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/budget/contracts_grants/info_contracts/inforeuro/inforeuro_en.cfm

The applicant must ensure that the resources which are necessary to carry out the action are not entirely provided by the EU grant.

Co-financing of the action may take the form of:

- the beneficiary's own resources,
- income generated by the action or work programme,
- financial contributions from third parties.

11.5. Calculation of the final grant amount

The final amount of the grant is calculated by the Commission at the time of the payment of the balance. The calculation involves the following steps:

Step 1 — Application of the reimbursement rate to the eligible costs

The amount under step 1 is obtained by applying the reimbursement rate specified in section 11.1.1 to the eligible costs actually incurred and accepted by the Commission, including costs declared in the form of flat rates to which the co-financing rate applies in accordance with section 11.1.2.

Step 2 — Limit to the maximum amount of the grant

The total amount paid to the beneficiaries by the Commission may in no circumstances exceed the maximum amount of the grant as indicated in the grant agreement. If the amount obtained following Step 1 is higher than this maximum amount, the final amount of the grant is limited to the latter.

Step 3 — Reduction due to the no-profit rule

‘Profit’ means the surplus of receipts over the total eligible costs of the action, where receipts are the amount obtained following Steps 1 and 2 plus the revenue generated by the action for beneficiaries other than non-profit organisations.

In-kind and financial contributions by third parties are not considered receipts.

The total eligible costs of the action are the consolidated total eligible costs approved by the Commission. The revenue generated by the action is the consolidated revenue established, generated or confirmed for beneficiaries other than non-profit organisations on the date on which the request for payment of the balance is drawn up.

If there is a profit, it will be deducted in proportion to the final rate of reimbursement of the actual eligible costs of the action approved by the Commission.

Step 4 — Reduction due to improper implementation or breach of other obligations

The Commission may reduce the maximum amount of the grant if the action has not been implemented properly (i.e. if it has not been implemented or has been implemented poorly, partially or late), or if another obligation under the Agreement has been breached.

The amount of the reduction will be proportionate to the degree to which the action has been implemented improperly or to the seriousness of the breach.

11.6. Reporting and payment arrangements

11.6.1 Payment arrangements

The beneficiary may request the following payments provided that the conditions of the grant agreement are fulfilled (e.g. payment deadlines, ceilings, etc.). The payment requests shall be accompanied by the documents provided below and detailed in the grant agreement:

Payment request	Accompanying documents
Pre-financing payment(s) corresponding to 75 % of the maximum grant amount	financial guarantee (if applicable, see section 11.6.2)
Interim payment: For the purpose of determining the amount due as interim payment, the reimbursement rate to be applied to the eligible costs approved by the Commission shall be 90 %. The total amount of pre-financing and interim payment shall not exceed 90 % of the maximum grant amount.	(a) interim technical report (b) interim financial statement (c) a certificate on the financial statements and underlying accounts (if applicable)
Payment of the balance The Commission will establish the amount of this payment on the basis of the calculation of the final grant amount (see section 11.5 above). If the total of earlier payments is higher than the final grant amount, the beneficiary will be required to reimburse the amount paid in excess by the Commission through a recovery order.	(a) final technical report (b) final financial statement (c) summary financial statement aggregating the financial statements already submitted previously and indicating the receipts (d) a certificate on the financial statements and underlying accounts (if applicable)

In case of a weak financial capacity, section 8.1 above applies.

11.6.2 Pre-financing guarantee

A pre-financing guarantee for up to the same amount as the pre-financing may be requested in order to limit the financial risks linked to the pre-financing payment.

The financial guarantee, in euro, shall be provided by an approved bank or financial institution established in one of the EU Member States. When the beneficiary is

established in a third country, the Commission may agree that a bank or financial institution established in that third country may provide the guarantee if it considers that the bank or financial institution offers equivalent security and characteristics as those offered by a bank or financial institution established in a Member State. Amounts blocked in bank accounts shall not be accepted as financial guarantees.

The guarantee may be replaced by:

- a joint and several guarantee by a third party or,
- a joint guarantee of the beneficiaries of an action who are parties to the same grant agreement.

The guarantee shall be released as the pre-financing is gradually cleared against interim payments or the payment of the balance, in accordance with the conditions laid down in the grant agreement.

As an alternative to requesting a guarantee on pre-financing, the Commission may decide to split the payment of pre-financing into several instalments.

11.7. Other financial conditions

a) Non-cumulative award

An action may only receive one grant from the EU budget.

Under no circumstances shall the same costs be financed twice by the Union budget. To ensure this, applicants shall indicate in the grant application the sources and amounts of Union funding received or applied for the same action or part of the action or for its (the applicant's) functioning during the same financial year as well as any other funding received or applied for the same action.

b) Non-retroactivity

No grant may be awarded retrospectively for actions already completed.

A grant may be awarded for an action which has already begun only where the applicant can demonstrate in the grant application the need to start the action before the grant agreement is signed.

In such cases, costs eligible for financing may not have been incurred prior to the date of submission of the grant application.

c) Implementation contracts/subcontracting

Where the implementation of the action requires the award of procurement contracts (implementation contracts), the beneficiary may award the contract in accordance with its usual purchasing practices provided that the contract is awarded to the tender offering best value for money or the lowest price (as appropriate), avoiding conflicts of interest.

The beneficiary is expected to clearly document the tendering procedure and retain the documentation in the event of an audit.

Entities acting in their capacity as contracting authorities within the meaning of Directive 2014/24/EU⁸ or contracting entities within the meaning of Directive 2014/25/EU⁹ must comply with the applicable national public procurement rules.

Beneficiaries may subcontract tasks forming part of the action. If they do so, they must ensure that, in addition to the above-mentioned conditions of best value for money and absence of conflicts of interests, the following conditions are also complied with:

- a) subcontracting does not cover core tasks of the action;
- b) recourse to subcontracting is justified because of the nature of the action and what is necessary for its implementation;
- c) the estimated costs of the subcontracting are clearly identifiable in the estimated budget;
- d) any recourse to subcontracting, if not provided for in description of the action, is communicated by the beneficiary and approved by the Commission. The Commission may grant approval:
 - (i) before any recourse to subcontracting, if the beneficiaries requests an amendment
 - (ii) after recourse to subcontracting if the subcontracting:
 - is specifically justified in the interim or final technical report and
 - does not entail changes to the grant agreement which would call into question the decision awarding the grant or be contrary to the equal treatment of applicants;
- e) the beneficiaries ensure that certain conditions applicable to beneficiaries, enumerated in the grant agreement (e.g. visibility, confidentiality, etc.), are also applicable to the subcontractors.

d) Financial support to third parties

The applications may envisage provision of financial support to third parties. In such case the applications must include:

- an exhaustive list of the types of activities for which a third party may receive financial support out of the following fixed list:
 - investment and installation costs for connectivity, digital devices, digital educational tools and content or similar activities;
- the definition of persons or categories of persons which may receive financial support out of the following categories:
 - primary, secondary and vocational schools located in remote areas, or the relevant authorities in charge of such schools, situated in EU member states and EFTA and EEA countries;
- the criteria for awarding financial support;

⁸ Directive 2014/24/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 February 2014 on public procurement and repealing Directive 2004/18/EC (OJ L 94, 28.3.2014, p. 65-242)

⁹ Directive 2014/25/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 February 2014 on procurement by entities operating in the water, energy, transport and postal services sectors and repealing Directive 2004/17/EC (OJ L 94, 28.3.2014, p. 243-374)

- the maximum amount to be granted to each third party and the criteria for determining it.

At least 50 % of the budget of this action is expected to be dedicated to financial support to third parties selected via open calls. The maximum amount of financial support to third parties, distributed through a grant, is EUR 20 000 per third party for the entire action duration but smaller amounts may also be justified. How the payment scheme for the Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) is set up, is up to the applicants to decide (e.g. a lump sum, multiple instalments or reimbursement of costs incurred by the third parties). The project beneficiaries are responsible for the proper use of the funding received by the third parties.

As a rule, the financial support to third parties should only finance costs that are **non-recurrent in nature** and fall within the time horizon of the action. The financial support to third parties should not cover **administrative expenditure** such as **staff costs** and **operating costs**. For example, maintenance costs of a recurrent nature would not be eligible but investments in upgrades, including overdue maintenance, should be possible to be supported under this action.

Additionally, the following conditions have to be fulfilled. Projects must publish widely their open calls and adhere to Horizon 2020 standards with respect to transparency, equal treatment, conflict of interest and confidentiality. All calls for third parties must be published on the Horizon 2020 Programme page of the Funding & Tenders Portal, and on the projects own web site. The calls must remain open for at least two months. If call deadlines are changed this must immediately be published on the call page on the Funding & Tenders Portal and all registered applicants must be informed of the change. Without delay, projects must publish the outcome of the call, including a description of the third party action, the date of the award, duration, and the legal name and country.

The FSTP calls(s) must have a clear European dimension.

The beneficiary of the EU grant must ensure that the recipients of the financial support allow the Commission, the European Anti-fraud Office (OLAF) and the Court of Auditors to exercise their powers of control on documents, information, even stored on electronic media, or on the final recipient's premises.

12. PUBLICITY

12.1. By the beneficiaries

Beneficiaries must clearly acknowledge the European Union's contribution in all publications or in conjunction with activities for which the grant is used.

In this respect, beneficiaries are required to give prominence to the name and emblem of the European Commission on all their publications, posters, programmes and other products realised under the co-financed project.

To do this they must use the text, the emblem and the disclaimer available at https://ec.europa.eu/info/resources-partners/european-commission-visual-identity_en.

If this requirement is not fully complied with, the beneficiary's grant may be reduced in accordance with the provisions of the grant agreement.

12.2. By the Commission

With the exception of scholarships paid to natural persons and other direct support paid to natural persons in most need, all information relating to grants awarded in the course of a financial year shall be published on an internet site of the European Union institutions no later than the 30 June of the year following the financial year in which the grants were awarded.

The Commission will publish the following information:

- name of the beneficiary;
- address of the beneficiary when the latter is a legal person, region when the beneficiary is a natural person, as defined on NUTS 2 level¹⁰ if he/she is domiciled within the EU or equivalent if domiciled outside the EU;
- subject of the grant;
- amount awarded.

Upon a reasoned and duly substantiated request by the beneficiary, the publication shall be waived if such disclosure risks threatening the rights and freedoms of individuals concerned as protected by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union or harm the commercial interests of the beneficiaries.

13. PROCESSING OF PERSONAL DATA

The European Commission is committed to protect your personal data and to respect your privacy. The Commission collects and further processes personal data pursuant to Regulation (EU) 2018/1725 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2018 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data by the Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies and on the free movement of such data.

The reply to any call for proposals involves the recording and processing of personal data (such as name, address and CV).

Unless indicated otherwise, the questions and any personal data requested that are required to evaluate the application in accordance with the call for proposal will be processed solely for that purpose by Unit G2, Interactive Technologies, Digital for Culture and Education of the Communications Networks, Content & Technology DG.

Details concerning the processing of your personal data are available on the privacy statement at:

https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/data_protection_privacy_notice_30_03_2020-dpo_template-clean.pdf.

Personal data may be registered in the Early Detection and Exclusion System by the Commission, should the beneficiary be in one of the situations mentioned in Articles 136 and 141 of Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/104611. For more information see the Privacy Statement on:

https://ec.europa.eu/budget/library/explained/management/protecting/privacy_statement_ede_s_en.pdf.

¹⁰ Commission Regulation (EC) No 105/2007 of 1 February 2007 amending the annexes to Regulation (EC) No 1059/2003 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of a common classification of territorial units for statistics (NUTS), OJ L39, 10.2.2007, p.1.

14. PROCEDURE FOR THE SUBMISSION OF PROPOSALS

Proposals must be submitted by the deadline set out under section 3.

No modification to the application is allowed once the deadline for submission has elapsed. However, if there is a need to clarify certain aspects or to correct clerical mistakes, the Commission may contact the applicant during the evaluation process.

Applicants will be informed in writing about the results of the selection process.

Electronic submission:

Applicants are requested to log in at <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/home> and follow the procedure for submitting an application.

Applications sent by fax or e-mail will not be accepted.

Due to technical constraints, some of the forms used in the submission system are standard forms for H2020 actions. Nevertheless, this Preparatory action is not a H2020 action and any reference to H2020 in the forms or in the templates must be disregarded. The only reference document is this Call document and the related Commission Decision C(2021)3006 of 04.05.2021.

➤ Contacts

For any questions, please contact:

CNECT-DIGITAL-EDUCATION@ec.europa.eu

Disclaimer: Any requests of replies do not constitute any ground to claim any expectation concerning the selection of the proposal or the award of the grant.

➤ Annexes:

- Application form Part A and Part B (provided in the submission system)
- Declaration on their honour (provided in the submission system)
- Model grant agreement - Multi-beneficiary (for information)
- Financial report template (for information)

Appendix
Specific conditions for direct personnel costs

1. Calculation

The ways of calculating eligible direct personnel costs laid down in points (a) and (b) below are recommended and accepted as offering assurance as to the costs declared being actual.

The Commission may accept a different method of calculating personnel costs used by the beneficiary, if it considers that it offers an adequate level of assurance of the costs declared being actual.

a) for persons working exclusively on the action:

{monthly rate for the person

multiplied by

number of actual months worked on the action }

The months declared for these persons may not be declared for any other EU or Euratom grant.

The **monthly rate** is calculated as follows:

{annual personnel costs for the person

divided by 12 }

using the personnel costs for each full financial year covered by the reporting period concerned.

If a financial year is not closed at the end of the reporting period, the beneficiaries must use the monthly rate of the last closed financial year available;

b) for persons working part time on the action

(i) If the person is assigned to the action at a fixed pro-rata of their working time:

{monthly rate for the person multiplied by pro-rata assigned to the action

multiplied by

number of actual months worked on the action }

The working time pro-rata declared for these persons may not be declared for any other EU or Euratom grant.

The monthly rate is calculated as above.

(ii) In other cases:

{hourly rate for the person multiplied by number of actual hours worked on the action}

or

{daily rate for the person multiplied by number of actual days worked on the action}

(rounded up or down to the nearest half-day)

The number of actual hours/days declared for a person must be identifiable and verifiable.

The total number of hours/days declared in EU or Euratom grants, for a person for a year, cannot be higher than the annual productive hours/days used for the calculations of the hourly/daily rate. Therefore, the maximum number of hours/days that can be declared for the grant are:

{number of annual productive hours/days for the year (see below)}

minus

total number of hours and days declared by the beneficiary, for that person for that year, for other EU or Euratom grants}.

The ‘**hourly/daily rate**’ is calculated as follows:

{annual personnel costs for the person

divided by

number of individual annual productive hours/days} using the personnel costs and the number of annual productive hours/days for each full financial year covered by the reporting period concerned.

If a financial year is not closed at the end of the reporting period, the beneficiaries must use the hourly/daily rate of the last closed financial year available.

The ‘number of individual annual productive hours/days’ is the total actual hours/days worked by the person in the year. It may not include holidays and other absences (such as sick leave, maternity leave, special leave, etc). However, it may include overtime and time spent in meetings, trainings and other similar activities.

2. Documentation to support personnel costs declared as actual costs

For **persons working exclusively on the action**, where the direct personnel costs are calculated following **point (a)**, there is no need to keep time records, if the beneficiary signs a **declaration** confirming that the persons concerned have worked exclusively on the action.

For **persons assigned to the action at a fixed pro-rata of their working time**, where the direct personnel costs are calculated following **point (b)(i)**, there is no need to keep time records, if the beneficiary signs a declaration that the persons concerned have effectively worked at the fixed pro-rata on the action.

For **persons working part time on the action**, where direct personnel costs are calculated following **point (b)(ii)**, the beneficiaries must keep **time records** for the number of hours/days declared. The time records must be in writing and approved by the persons working on the action and their supervisors, at least monthly.

In the absence of reliable time records of the hours worked on the action, the Commission may accept alternative evidence supporting the number of hours/days declared, if it considers that it offers an adequate level of assurance.

HISTORY OF CHANGES			
Version	Publication Date	Change	Page
1.0	06.05.2021	▪ Initial version	