

H2020 Work Programme 2014-15:

Spreading Excellence and Widening Participation

Call: H2020-TWINN-2015: Twinning

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Version: 15 January 2015

IMPORTANT NOTICE: This document is the result of a compilation of questions received by potential applications prior the deadline and answers provided by the European Commission. Its intention is to help potential applicants. It does not however replace the call text. This is a working document and as such it is being revised on a regular basis. The latest version however can always be retrieved from the web pages of the Participant Portal.

Definition "Widening Countries": As described in the Work Programme text, under the specific eligibility conditions of this call these are the countries that are ranked below 70% of the EU average of the composite indicator of Research Excellence and include the following Member States (MS): *Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia;* and Associated Countries (AC): *Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Faroe Islands, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey.*

Category: General

1. What is the reimbursement rate for a Twinning project? Is it the standard 100% for direct eligible costs and a flat 25% of direct costs for indirect costs (overheads) as with most other Horizon 2020 actions?

- Yes, the standard cost reimbursement model (100%/25%) of Horizon 2020 applies for Twinning actions.

2. Can a proposal request a contribution below or above € 1 million?

- Yes, however proposals are encouraged to be close to the range of € 1 million.

3. What is the minimum, typical and maximum duration of each project?

- A Twinning project is foreseen to last for up to 3 years.

4. Can a proposal outline several defined areas of research or is it necessary to outline one defined area of research in one proposal?

- The Work Programme specifies that "Twinning aims at significantly strengthening a defined field of research in a particular knowledge institution....". Thus, a Twinning proposal must outline one defined area of research.

5. Is there any pre-financing for a granted Twinning project?

- The exact percentage of pre-financing for Twinning projects has not been confirmed yet, but it is expected to be around 50%.

Category: Country eligibility

6. Concerning the participating institutions, can there be more than one (low performing) partner from a Widening Country? If yes, should the ratio of partners from Widening Countries versus non-Widening Countries be of around 50%?

- Yes. As long as the minimum eligibility requirements are respected (i.e. the one coordinator from a Widening country and two advanced institutions from two different MS or AC), then additional partners are allowed according to the needs and objectives of each proposal. However, applicants need to bear in mind that as described in the Work Programme text, "...Twinning aims at significantly strengthening a defined field of research in a particular knowledge institutionby creating a link between this institution and at least two internationally-leading research institutions....".
- There are no conditions or ideal ratio with respect to the balance of partners from Widening vis a vis non-Widening Countries.

6a. Is there a maximum or preferred number of partners in a Twinning proposal?

- There is no maximum number of partners as long as the minimum eligibility requirements are respected. The Commission however considers that the number of partners in a Twinning project has to be kept to the minimum possible, in order to have the optimal effect on the low performing partner institution in the Widening Country. The intention of Twinning is not to create large networks, as this would risk diluting the expected effect on the low performing institution.

7. Where should the internationally-leading (advanced) institutions be established? Can the internationally leading institutions be established in the same country as the coordinator from the Widening country?

- The internationally-leading (advanced) institutions can be established in any EU Member State or Associated Country to Horizon 2020.
- As long as the minimum eligibility requirements are respected (i.e. there are at least two internationally-leading (advanced) institutions from two different countries other than that of the coordinator) then additional partners established in the same country as the coordinator are allowed.

8. Is there an added value in the consortium to have internationally-leading partners from non-Widening Countries rather than partners from Widening Countries?

- The added-value depends on the quality of the partner organisation itself and not its location. If it is an internationally-leading partner and happens to be in a Widening Country this is perfectly possible. In any case, the qualities of this internationally leading partner should be well elaborated and demonstrated in the proposal.

9. Is there any requirement to "twin" with partners from stronger (or weaker) regions in terms of innovation performance in Widening Countries?

- There is no such requirement foreseen in the Work Programme (WP). The WP text clearly states that the only eligibility criterion is that the coordinating partner is established in one of the Widening Countries.

10. Is there any limitation on the number of Twinning proposals submitted by each Widening country?

- There are no restrictions on the number of Twinning proposals submitted by each Widening country.

11. Can an institution in a Widening country participate in two (or more) different Twinning proposals, in the one as a coordinator in order to strengthen their research potential and in the other proposal as an internationally-leading (advanced) institution?

- Yes this is possible, however it may compromise the credibility of an organisation if it is acting both as a leading institution as well as a coordinator (unless of course the two proposals address different fields of science).

Category: Organisation eligibility

12. Is there any specific requirement on the nature of the organisation acting as the coordinator from the Widening Country?

- No proposal will be disqualified on grounds of non-eligibility for having a coordinating organisation of an incorrect nature. However, as also described in the Work Programme, the coordinator is strongly encouraged to be a public or private research active university or a public or private non-profit research organisation.

13. Is there any specific requirement on the nature of the organisations acting as internationally-leading (advanced) partners?

- No proposal will be disqualified on grounds of non-eligibility for having an internationally-leading organisation of an incorrect nature. However, as also described in the Work Programme, the internationally-leading organisations are encouraged to be public or private research intensive universities or research organisations.

14. Can enterprises (incl. research intensive companies and SMEs) participate in a Twinning proposal? Can they act as coordinators of Twinning proposals?

- According to the Work Programme the main partners of a Twinning proposal are normally universities, research organisations, or private not for profit research institutions. However, once the minimum eligibility requirements are met, bringing in a company as an additional partner if properly justified is also possible.
- Applicants should pay attention to the fact that a private, for profit, company should not be the coordinator of a Twinning project.

15. How is a research active or a research intensive university defined? For example can an institution that does not grant doctoral degrees, but is very active in R&D and has a history of significant EU projects be considered as research active or research intensive?

- There is no pre-defined definition of research active or research intensive universities or research organisations for the objectives of this call. Also as specified before, no proposal will be disqualified on grounds of non-eligibility for having an organisation of an incorrect nature.
- Having mentioned the above, in direct answer to the question, research should be a core activity of the institution and this has to be supported by sufficient evidence. The fact that an institution does not grant doctoral degrees while not compromising in itself is not however a good starting point.

16. Is there any limitation on how many Twinning proposals one organisation from a Widening country can coordinate? Is there a limitation in how many proposals an internationally-leading partner can participate in?

- There is no limitation on how many Twinning proposals one organisation from a Widening country can coordinate.
- There is no limitation for an internationally-leading partner to be involved in several Twinning proposals.

17. Can an internationally leading (advanced) institution from a third country (e.g. USA) participate as an additional partner?

- An internationally leading (advanced) institution from a third country (e.g. USA) can participate as an additional partner (as long as the minimum requirement of two partners from two MS or AC is respected) under the rules governing the participation of third countries in H2020 (i.e. for the case of an institution from the USA which is classified under the category of "industrialized countries and emerging economies" they would normally need to cover their own costs of participation).
- Further details on third country participation in H2020 can be found in the following link: http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/docs/h2020-funding-guide/cross-cutting-issues/international-cooperation_en.htm#countries

18. Is it possible to submit a proposal as an organisation that represents a group of research entities within the Widening Country? All of these entities would operate as a single organisation.

- Yes, this is possible.

Category: Cost Eligibility

For general information and clarifications on cost eligibility in H2020, potential applicants can check the Annotated Model Grant Agreement (MGA) that can be found on the participant portal in the link below: http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/grants_manual/amga/h2020-amga_en.pdf

19. Are research costs eligible under a Twinning action?

- No. As this action is a Coordination and Support Action (CSA), action tasks should not include any research tasks. This applies for all beneficiaries, i.e. both to costs of beneficiaries which are an internationally-leading (advanced) institution and to costs of the coordinating entity established in the Widening Country.

20. The Work Programme states that the twinning activities “will provide no support for hiring new permanent research staff”. What does this mean? Are personnel costs (i.e. salaries) eligible in a Twinning project?

- Twinning is not aimed at hiring new researchers (permanent or temporary), as its objectives, amongst others, focus on raising the existing staff's research profile.
- However, personnel costs (i.e. salaries) are eligible as follows:
 - for personnel of all beneficiaries (from Widening or non-Widening countries),
 - regardless of their function (researchers, administration, management),
 - regardless of their status at the organizations (permanent or temporary or newly recruited)
 - provided that these personnel costs are directly attributed to the eligible activities (non-research) indicated in the Work Programme text and
 - subject to the cost eligibility conditions in Article 6 of the Model Grant Agreement.

21. What are the typical costs in a Twinning project?

- The Work Programme, refers to a non-exhaustive list of measures to be supported under Twinning projects: staff exchanges, expert visits, short-term on-site or virtual trainings, and workshops; conference attendance, organisation of joint summer school type activities, dissemination and outreach activities.

- In general, costs relating to administration, networking, coordination, training, management, travel costs etc. are typical costs that could be funded under a Twinning project.

22. It was mentioned that the internationally-leading (advanced) institutions may not pay salaries, but "costs associated with the provision of expertise" are eligible. Is this valid? What about those who are not working exclusively on the Twinning action?

- As explained in question 20, the hours that the employees of all types (i.e. researchers, administrators or managers) of both the coordinating institution and the internationally-leading (advanced) partner address to project activities (non-research) are eligible costs under this programme.
- As provided in Article 6 MGA, only the hours worked on the action can be taken into consideration to calculate personnel costs. According to Article 18 MGA, for people not working exclusively for the action, the beneficiary must show the actual hours worked with reliable time records.

23. Will hiring PhD students be eligible since they are not considered as "permanent" staff?

- Twinning should not be used as a vehicle for increasing the population of PhD students of the coordinating institution. However, using existing or new PhD students partly for tasks of the Twinning programme is possible: in this case the relevant costs (remuneration of the PhD students for concrete project tasks but also travel and communication expenses associated to the project) are eligible, subject to the cost eligibility conditions in Article 6 of the Model Grant Agreement.

24. What sort of costs could be charged to a project by an internationally-leading (advanced) partner?

- Costs for exchanges of personnel, travel allowances and costs associated with the provision of expertise are some of the typical costs that could be claimed by internationally-leading (advanced) partners under a Twinning project.

25: Can the internationally-leading (advanced) institutions receive EU contribution from a Twinning project? If yes, what is the ideal ratio of budget allocated to the advanced institutions compared to the coordinator from the Widening Country?

- Yes, as this is a multi-beneficiary action. This means that all beneficiaries, including the coordinator from the Widening country and the internationally-leading (advanced) institutions will sign/accede to the grant agreement and receive project funding.
- There is no ideal ratio regarding the allocation of funding between the advanced institutions and the coordinator in the Widening country. Of course, it has to be kept in mind that the

objectives of Twinning are focused toward strengthening the coordinating institution in the Widening country.

26. Is subcontracting allowed in Twinning projects?

- The general rule applicable to H2020 projects is that beneficiaries must have the appropriate resources to implement the action (Article 8 MGA). However if necessary to implement the action, subcontracting is allowed according to the general Horizon 2020 rules outlined in Article 23 of the Rules for Participation and Article 13 of the MGA. Subcontracting may cover only a limited part of the action. The phrase "limited part of the action" is not pre-defined, but core activities of the project should not be subcontracted.

27. Can experts outside the consortium participate in trainings as trainers?

- Training may be subcontracted to a third party expert, subject to the Rules in Article 13 of the Model Grant Agreement (MGA). Alternatively, the travel and related subsistence allowances of the third party expert may be eligible, as explained in the Annotated MGA under Article 6.2.D.1. entitled, "Travel costs and related subsistence allowances".

28. Our Centre maintains multiple research partnerships with other national RDI entities. We believe that our research mission can be accomplished only through successful collaboration with scientists from these institutions. Is it possible to include these persons (who are not our employees) as collaborators in the Twinning programme?

- The general rule applicable to Horizon 2020 projects is that beneficiaries must have the appropriate resources to implement the action (Article 8 MGA). However if necessary to implement the action, beneficiaries may use in-kind contributions, including seconded personnel provided by third parties, subject to the rules in Articles 11 and 12 of the MGA.

29. Regarding "short-term expert visits and on-site or virtual training" - The visits and lectures can be held only by the professors from the institutions within the consortium? Or may one invite also professors from other prestigious institutions that are not in the consortium?

- Invitation of professors from other institutions is considered as subcontracting and is therefore only allowed if it is on a small scale and if the expertise cannot be provided by the internationally-leading (advanced) partners.

30. Cost of experiments performed at third party laboratories. Is it possible to get financing for experiments that should be performed in specialized laboratories?

- Costs for research activities are not eligible.

31. If a researcher from the coordinating institution in the Widening Country stays for a month or two at the internationally-leading (advanced) partner institution, is it possible to cover the cost for the researchers from both institutions?

- Costs for the exchange are eligible as long as they are not for research activities both for the coordinator as well as for the internationally-leading (advanced) partner. This means clearly that travel and subsistence costs for these researchers (posted for a period to a partner institution will be eligible for reimbursement). However, it must be ensured that there is no double funding. This means that the same costs cannot be financed twice by the EU budget.

32. In case several beneficiaries organise jointly seminars and summer schools, is it possible to get financing for all beneficiaries that would be involved in the organization of the event?

- Yes, this is possible. However, it must be ensured that there is no double funding. This means that the same costs cannot be financed twice by the EU budget. However it must be ensured that there is no double funding. This means that the same costs cannot be financed twice by the EU budget. Each beneficiary has to charge the costs that it has incurred. Moreover, it should be kept in mind that among costs eligibility conditions in Article 6 MGA, costs must be necessary for the implementation of the action and must be reasonable and compliant with the principle of sound financial management in particular economy and efficiency.

33. The Work Programme specifies that "twinning activities will not provide support to infrastructure and equipment." In this context, can one still purchase supplies / software / database subscriptions / PCs / laptops? Does this mean that use of existing infrastructure or equipment cannot be supported even where normal accounting practices are to charge these to an individual project?

- Costs for consumables as well as software related to the training and subscription fees to online services, may be eligible, however this does not apply to equipment (PCs, or laptops) or infrastructure. No consumables will be reimbursed for research activities.

Category: Other

34. The one of the specific evaluation criteria mentioned in the Work Programme refer to the "Level of potential impact of a project proposal at regional/national level defined in terms of expected publications in peer reviewed journals...". How can the consortium show and prove that publications will be published in high impact journals, if the research activities are not funded?

- As this is a Coordination and Support action (CSA) no research activities are funded. In particular the aim is to enhance the R&I capacity of the coordinating institution and to raise the research profile of its research staff. It is therefore up to the proposer to convince evaluators how the Twinning exercise will help the coordinating institution advance in terms of expected impact both on future publications and enhanced participation in EU and national R&I funding programmes.

35: Is a consortium agreement between the beneficiaries required? What other kind of internal arrangements/partnerships/agreements need to be made between the beneficiaries themselves?

- Yes, signing a consortium agreement between all the beneficiaries in the project (i.e. all entities that sign the grant agreement) is the only requirement from the Commission's side as with standard Horizon 2020 rules.
- Any other internal agreements/arrangements are voluntary and up to the participants themselves.

36: Is there an indication on what profile the evaluators will have? What are the evaluation criteria and their relative weighting?

- The Commission will apply the appropriate expert selection and standard evaluation procedures in an open and transparent manner, according to the Commission's highest quality standards and known evaluation criteria (no hidden weightings).

37. Is an ERA Chair eligible for funding of a twinning project (call H2020-TWINN-2015) for widening its activities, in particular training of staff on application of new analytical techniques and methods?

- Yes, that is possible, however double funding is not allowed, so it should be clear which costs will be covered by which project and they cannot be declared for funding twice.

38. What kind of the main project outputs does the Commission expect from a Twinning action?

- The main idea of this call as explained in the work programme is to enhance the R&I capacity and to raise the research profile of the staff of the applicant entity. This is done through interaction of the institution located in the Widening country with the internationally leading partners through conferences, workshops, seminars, exchange of best practices etc. but NOT through research projects funded by Twinning (Twinning cannot support research projects).

39. Is a PhD degree a mandatory requirement for the scientific coordinator of the applicant organization?

- A PhD degree is not mandatory, scientific excellence is. However it would be difficult to convince the expert evaluators on the value of a proposal in which the Coordinator lacks a PhD.

40. Is alignment and complementarity with the national or regional R&I Smart Specialisation Strategy (RIS3) of the Widening country obligatory? What about applicants from Associated countries?

- As also specified in the Work Programme, applicants from Widening Countries are only encouraged to identify alignment and complementarity with the RIS3 of their respective country or region. However the Commission stresses the fact that there is no obligation whatsoever for a Twinning proposal to follow RIS3 priorities.

- Associated Countries do not benefit from Cohesion Policy funding and therefore do not have to produce an RIS3 as an ex-ante ESIF conditionality. Thus the encouragement for alignment with the RIS3 will not apply for Associated Countries. However, applicants for Twinning proposals coming from Associated Countries are encouraged to align to the priorities of their existing national/regional R&I Strategy, if there is one in place.

41. What is the expected duration of short-term staff exchanges and/or expert visits? Are they limited to a few weeks? A few months?

There is no pre-defined duration for short term staff exchanges or expert visits. They should however, add value to the project and they should last for a reasonable timeframe of a few weeks or a few months; more than 9 months would probably be considered as too long.

ANNEX I

KPI for Widening – Need for additional information from H2020-TWINN-2015 applicants

Introduction

To evaluate the impact of activities in Horizon 2020 Key Performance Indicators (KPI) are required. For this reason the Commission services developed the following Widening KPI: ***"Evolution of the publications in high impact journals in the relevant research fields"***. Definition: This indicator measures the evolution (compared to a reference period of three years prior to the signature of the grant agreement) in % of the peer-reviewed publications in high impact journals (in the top 10% impact ranked journals) in the given research fields of the research organisations (on average) in low-performing countries funded under the "Twinning" and "ERA-Chair" measures.

Implications for applicants to the H2020-TWINN-2015 call

Twinning applicants are required by the time of the call deadline of 7 May 2015 to do the following:

- Coordinators from low performing institutions in the Widening Country add a task and deliverable to the DoA (Description of the Action) in their proposal.

1) The task will be to introduce in the reporting tool on the Participant Portal by month 2 of the project all publications (in the particular field of research) of the coordinator during the three years preceding the start date of the project.

2) The deliverable will be a one-page statement that the task has been completed.

IMPORTANT NOTE: The Commission would like to clarify that **the required list of publications shall not be part of proposals** but is to be provided only for funded projects at a later stage and that **this task and deliverable have no impact on the evaluation process** and are solely used for reporting purposes.