

## Selection process and assessment methods

Project applications and assessment in European Territorial Cooperation Programmes

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In this presentation:

- The selection process
- Eligibility check
- Specific issues linked to quality assessment: assessors; ways of assessing
- Steering and Monitoring Committees;
- National sub-committees;
- Decisions
- Programme tools: Different types of calls

## Why assess?

To select high quality projects.



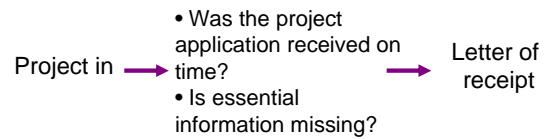
To discourage low quality ones.



To secure programme success!



## Is the project admissible?



## Examples of letter of acceptance

**Re: Acknowledgement of receipt of Application**

I am writing to confirm the receipt of the application entitled from your organisation. The date of receipt by the Secretariat is

The application will now enter the formal assessment regarding eligibility. You will be notified as soon as possible regarding the outcome of this assessment.

Yours sincerely,

**Re: Acknowledgement of receipt of Application**

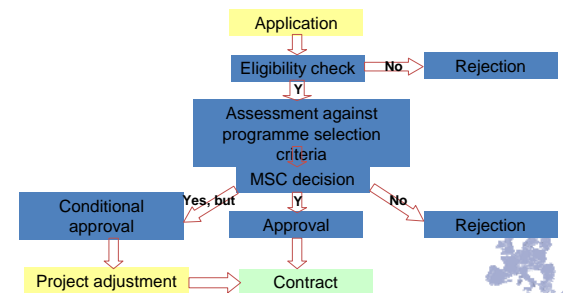
I am writing to confirm the receipt of the application entitled from your organisation. The date of receipt by the Secretariat is

For your information the following **essential information is missing:**

1. We must receive this information before the project can receive a full technical assessment. Failure to comply will mean that the project will not be considered by the Steering Committee.

Yours sincerely,

## General application process





Eligibility check – basics:

- Done by the JTS (normally);
- All projects are subject to eligibility check;
- Intended as a quick “yes” and “no” check;
- For some programmes: A project rejected at this stage - not viewed by the MSC;
- Should be completed fairly quickly but...



What could be checked during the eligibility stage?

- Are partners involved from the eligible area ?
- Project activities are carried out in the Programme area?
- Are requirements for cross-border/ transnationality met?
- Is there evidence for match-funding?
- Each partner will contribute to project funding?
- Each partner will be active in the development and implementation of the joint action plan?
- The project addresses at least one of the objectives within the priorities defined in the Operational Programme
- The project tackles territorial challenges of the XX programme.
- The following types of projects will be supported XXXX.



What could be checked during the eligibility stage?

- The scope of the project renders it ineligible under cross-border Programmes as mapped by the EC
- No other Community or national grant is received.
- Is the Application Form completed?
- Will the project complete all eligible activities before 30 September 2015?
- The Lead Beneficiary and the partners are eligible (type and territory)
- Partnership commitment demonstrated by submitting Letters of Support/Commitment
- Private partner solvency issues
- The project does not contravene EU legislation, etc.
- And other...



Some eligibility criteria may have quality implications:

- Often eligibility check conclusions are the base for quality considerations (e.g. partnership spread; strength of cooperation; relevance for the programme; of distinguished CB/transnational nature);
- These observations may not be sufficient to reject the project at this stage: They are however further confirmed/rejected under the quality check;
- Eligibility criteria could give a good signal of what the programme is really interested in.



Typical reasons for rejection at this stage:

Could be linked to any of the above reasons but most commonly at this stage:

- LP or partner not from the eligible area;
- LP/partner not eligible;
- Activities are carried outside the eligible area;
- The project fails to provide the documentation required;
- In some programmes: Has the application been submitted within the set deadlines?



**Letter example: Eligibility check**

**Re: Project application**

I am writing to inform you that the secretariat has carried out the first part of the technical assessment procedure regarding the eligibility check for this project and that it failed for the following reasons:

- 1.
- 2.

If you wish to re-apply, the next call for applications will be opened on      and will close on      .

Yours sincerely,



**Example letter: Eligibility check**

Re: Project

I am writing to inform you that this project has passed the eligibility check which is the first stage of the technical assessment procedure, carried out by the technical secretariat on behalf of the national authorities of the participating countries in the XX Programme. This means that the project will be considered by the Steering Committee at the next meeting.

Subject to the approval of the project by the Steering Committee, the date of eligibility for claiming funds will be which is the date the project was first received by the secretariat. Information on preparation costs can be found in XX document.

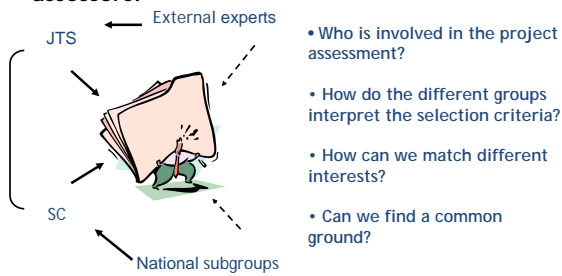
All applicants will be informed about the Steering Committee's decisions immediately following the meeting.  
Yours sincerely,



Quality assessment: Assessment criteria basics

- Constitute the main quality check of a project
- Is carried out by applying core selection criteria
- Is carried out by the JTS; external experts, combination of both, sometimes by SC members;
- A recommendation is formed;
- Based on recommendations and internal discussions SC takes decision about a project;
- A letter is sent to the project Lead Beneficiary informing about the SC decision
- The Secretariat or MA draws up a Contract on behalf of the national authorities of the Lead Beneficiary organisation.

Your projects are as weak as the weakest assessors!



Main principles in project assessment:

- Objectivity of assessment
- Equal treatment
- Transparency of assessment
- Professionalism
- Analysis
- Take account of information presented in the application only



Who can be an assessor?

- JTS staff or Managing Authority
- Consultants with specific sectoral knowledge
- University professors
- Other ministry staff
- Regional bodies
- Steering Committee members
- Other...



Administering the quality check

**Group work:** Who is involved?

- JTS vs. External experts - forming a decision

Why assess in-house? Why use external experts?

What are the warning signs?

INTERREG assessing expertise

Main summary points: Assessment in-the-house

Pro's	Con's
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Know the programme best;</li> <li>• Involved in identifying priorities/objectives;</li> <li>• Involved in identifying gaps;</li> <li>• Secure the principles of TC are adhered to;</li> <li>• Understand best the specificity of TC programmes;</li> <li>• Experience with what does/doesn't work;</li> <li>• Knowledge of what is there;</li> <li>• Can detect early warning signs;</li> <li>• Consequences to deal with.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impartiality;</li> <li>• Sectoral experience;</li> <li>• High staff turn-over;</li> <li>• Inexperienced new staff to assess projects;</li> <li>• Capacity (when too many applications)</li> </ul>

INTERREG assessing expertise

Main summary points: Assessing by external experts

Pro's	Con's
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good sectoral knowledge;</li> <li>• Impartial;</li> <li>• Good reputation;</li> <li>• A fresh look at the issues.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Often no in-depth knowledge about the programme;</li> <li>• Often no knowledge about TC;</li> <li>• Often no knowledge about the programme priorities;</li> <li>• Often no prior knowledge of what is on the ground;</li> <li>• They don't have to "live" with the consequences from their recommendations;</li> <li>• Costs.</li> </ul>

INTERREG assessing expertise

How can we make better use of external experts?

- Invite them to programme thematic meetings;
- Arrange for regular briefings between external assessors and programme staff;
- Have a small number of external assessors that you can trust - e.g. one to two per theme;
- Make available to them results of programme gap analyses, scoping studies, focused calls or other important programme documents which direct the scope of the programme (e.g. spatial studies identifying new challenges);
- Use the same external experts

INTERREG assessing expertise

Supporting documents - external experts need them!

- Guides on the project call/assessment manuals
- Assessment procedure
- Specific guides for calls

*This is in order to:*

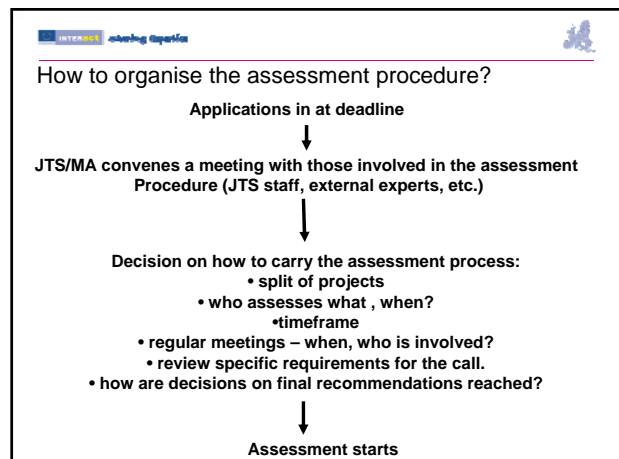
- ... understand the programme better (needs, priorities, etc.)
- ... understand their role better (they are not the ultimate decision-maker)

INTERREG assessing expertise

Can we marry the two approaches?

- Identify cases where external expertise is necessary;
- Invite experts to SC meetings- careful not to turn the meetings into technical discussions;
- Invite external experts to thematic events when applications are being developed;
- If set on using external experts make sure they are reliable/tested;

*Programme examples?*



**How is the assessment carried out?**  
By numerical scales (example)

Example 1	Example 2	Example 3
1 - poor / very poor	-2 - very poor	0 - insufficient
2 - fair / poor	-1 - poor	1 - sufficient
3 - good / adequate	0 fair	3 - appropriate
4 - very good / good	+1 - good	5 - completely appropriate
5 - excellent	+2 - excellent	

**Weighting and thresholds (example)**

Criterion	Max score	Weighting	Weighted Final Score
<b>CONTENT-RELATED CRITERIA</b>			
Relevance	10	x3	30
Contribution / consistency	10	x1	10
Value	10	x4	40
Outcomes	10	x4	40
Horizontal issues	10	x1	10
<b>IMPLEMENTATION-RELATED CRITERIA</b>			
Partnership / management	10	x1	10
Methodology (work plan)	10	x3	30
Budget	10	x2	20
Communication	10	x1	10
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>200</b>
<b>QUALITY THRESHOLD (65 %)</b>			<b>130</b>

**How is the assessment carried out?**  
By qualitative scales (example)

Criteria	H	M	L	Comments
Contribution to transnational regional development			X	The project does not apply a comprehensible transnational approach as most of the pilot project activities contribute to limited urban but not transnational regional development. The actions taken to deliver an EU level Agenda are not convincing, benefits generated are not clearly defined.

**Group discussion:**

- Benefits and drawbacks from using scoring systems
- Benefits and drawbacks from using qualitative scales

**Programme example:**  
Question 1: Extent of cross border cooperation:  
*Score: 0-25-45*

**Strong:** The project demonstrates strong cross border cooperation; it complies with all 4 cooperation criteria and brings added-value to the programme by addressing common issues, providing tangible outcomes which have common benefits and the transfer of expertise across the programme area;

**Medium:** medium level of cross-border cooperation as it complies with at least 3 of the cooperation criteria and brings added value in terms of addressing common issues, providing tangible outcomes which have common benefits and the transfer of expertise across the programme area;

**Weak:** weak cross border cooperation based on compliance with at least 2 of the four cooperation criteria but does not demonstrate the added value that it brings to the programme area.

**JMC and JSC – where is the difference?**

JMC	JSC
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• compulsory for each programme</li> <li>• secures and oversees programme implementation</li> <li>• each contry of the programme is represented</li> <li>• takes decision about programme management issues, e.g. discusses and reviews criteria for selecting of projects; reviews criteria following the programme needs; discuss and agree programme documents and templates; reviews progress on targets, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• optional programme body</li> <li>• set at the first meeting of the MC</li> <li>• responsible for the selection of projects;</li> <li>• reports its task to the MC;</li> <li>• has its own rules of procedure</li> <li>• usually implies wider representation</li> </ul>



Decision-making: Programme Steering Committees

***Steering Committees are the programme's ultimate decision-maker on project selection. They act on behalf of the Member States. As such they have a key quality assurance role!***



How do Steering Committees work?

- SC gets together after recommendations have been formed (usually 2 times per year);
- They receive the full applications together with the recommendations prior to the meeting (in some programmes 3 weeks);
- Each meeting has a Chairman (on a rotating principle) to facilitate discussions and draw conclusions;
- Representatives are formed from the national, regional and local level.
- It is also possible to involve other socio-economic actors.
- There are participants with no-voting status.
- The JTS/MA is also present at the meeting
- Decisions should be reached on each project that has passed eligibility check.



How are Steering Committees run?

- What do you send them in advance? When?
- The need for pre-meeting - with whom? Why?
- How do SCs convene?
  - What are the roles in the SC? What is the role of the JTS?
  - Right of vote/no right of vote? Who?
  - Discussion of projects - one by one, per priority, other...
  - How is decision reached?
- Rules of procedures for SC - what do they normally cover?
  - For example: Tasks, conflict of interest, membership, tasks and remit of chairperson; quorum and decision-making; requirements for decisions on projects, working language, confidentiality.



Monitoring and Steering Committee – single or separate body?

Quality considerations to be kept in mind:

- It is expected that stronger links to the national level will be built
- Running back-to-back SC and MC meetings may save time for travel but at the same time sufficient time should be allowed for discussions and decision-making in both committees.
- Decisions on providing funding and monitoring the effects of these decisions are combined in one body



National subcommittees

- To allow relevant actors to express opinion regarding the projects;
- To formulate national opinion and priorities;
- Who can participate?
- How does it work?



Positive aspects:

- Allows for a health-check against national/regional priorities and relevance to national/regional debates
- Allows additional expert opinions to be expressed and considered
- Improves transparency of programme procedures and decision-making
- Improves the sense of ownership among stakeholders
- Can provide an indication of the perceived relevance of project objectives and results - i.e. an indication about the real strategic value of the project



Some concerns:

- Could undermine the programme's decision-making structure;
- Not all actors participating in sub-committees are familiar with the principles/nature of Territorial Cooperation programmes/projects
- Opens the door for national lobbying by project partners
- If the final SC decision is different to the sub-committee opinion, this can lead to tension, requests for appeal, etc.



Quality assurance – the final goal!

- SCs should approve projects that suit best the programme's goal;
- Can we secure transfer between programme preparation group and SC members?
- The base for decision-making should be clear;
  - When to give conditional approvals and when to reject a project?
  - Discourage project lobbying
- Can we make SC members aware of the implications of their decisions?
- What to do in cases where decisions largely overturn recommendation?



4 types of decisions:

- Approval
- Approval with conditions
- Rejection with a recommendation to re-apply
- Rejection



Approval with conditions

Why?

- Are we afraid to loose applicants?
- Do we have sufficient projects in the pipeline?
- Is this seen as a "life-saver"?

When?

- many programmes feel quite reluctant to have conditional approvals;
- conditional approval linked to formal project issues;
- strict procedure (e.g. final approval by written procedure) and deadlines should be in place;

*Don't forget the de-commitment clock is ticking!*



Recommendation to re-apply

- The project idea is good but there are serious concerns with:
  - Management structure;
  - Partnership structure;
  - Cooperation element;
  - Outputs delivered;
  - Proportionality of work to budget requested
  - Other...
- Again, is this a "life-saver"?
- Clear rejection to "bad" projects

Common reasons for rejection

- Project idea does not fit the programme
- No demonstrated need for cooperation
- Planned project results did not justify the budget requested
- Partnership and/or management structures are weak
- No clear description of activities
- No logical link between activities and intended results
- Project is a repeat of existing activities
- Project does not fit with local/regional/national policies



What should be sent to applicants?

- Decision of the SC;
- Reasons for the decision;
- Sometimes programmes send the full text of the assessment (without scores);
- What is the new procedure (if conditional approval)?
- What could be done by the project/JTS (if recommendation to re-apply)?



Subsidy Contracts/ Grant Offer Letters

- Sent by the MA or the JTS on behalf of the MA
- Covers the need to comply with programme, national and Community rules and regulations
- Allows projects to carry out the approved activities
- Extra activities need the programme's advance approval
- Timeframe
- Implications of delays



On-going calls:

- Applications are submitted on a continuous basis;
- Assessment is carried out once or two times a year;
- Normal selection process.

Fast track mini-projects

- Used for preparatory projects by some programmes
- Implies a more informal assessment procedure; less rigid assessment criteria;
- May involve JTS decision on projects without the involvement of the SC.



Focused calls (programme tool)

*Focused calls* →

- on specific programme themes/ sub-themes;
- could include specific requirements to projects;
- agreed with MC;
- based on findings from gap analysis;
- could be on-going but usually not linked to 1st call



Over focused calls

- Drawbacks could be:
  - Too high/ambitious - over-focused -> no capacity in the regions to develop projects -> Few projects - > de-commitment risk
  - Transparency for project applicants, in case of restricted calls
  - Political back-up, also considering the national co-financing
- Solution (?): Involving the stakeholders concerned?



Strategic calls: programme tool

- ... strategic criteria on top of the "normal" criteria;
- ... integrated strategic thinking throughout the whole selection criteria
- ... strategic criteria can be used e.g. in focused calls

*Is the selection process different?*



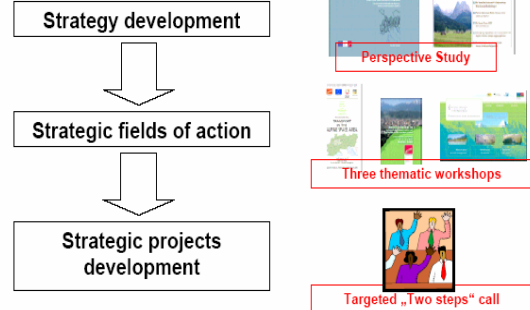
Programme tool: IIIB Alpine Space - two-step approach

Purpose:

- improvement of the quality of the submitted project proposals
- better coordination between projects
- increase of the visibility of the programme
- involvement of the political level



### How did they move to a “two-step” procedure?



#### What did we succeed in?

- a few very good projects
- best practice process
- put 2007 - 2013 on track
- a first idea on what a *strategic project* could be

#### What did we miss?

- real transnationality not always achieved
- bigger projects = less projects
- „top-down“ perception
- procedure needed some fine tuning
- put more emphasis on project generation