

FAQ

LIFE operating grants to support NGOs active in the areas of environment and climate action

Questions and answers relating to the 2019 call for proposals

1) Question: how is the Call structured?

Answer: Since 2015, the LIFE Work Programme¹ as well as the financing decision² foresee a system of biennial Framework Partnership Agreements (FPAs) to ensure more continuity for the beneficiaries of operating grants. The selected NGOs will conclude, at a later stage, annual Specific Grant Agreements. The 2019 call is the third round of FPA calls.

2) Question: What is the planning of the call?

Answer: The call for NGOs comprises two steps: first the submission of proposals for the Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) and then the application for the Specific Grant Agreement (SGA). Only those NGOs whose FPA proposal has been selected in the first stage and for who that there is enough budget will be requested to submit a proposal for an SGA, covering the financial year 2020 of the NGO. In 2020 another such SGA invitation will be sent to cover the financial year 2021 of the NGO (again only for those NGOs who have been successful in the FPA call).

3) Question: What is a Framework Partnership Agreement?

Answer: Resulting from this call, an FPA is a contract signed for 2 years between EASME and the selected NGOs. It establishes a partnership between the parties and lays down the general rules. In its Annex it includes a biennial strategic plan for the work foreseen by the NGO during the next 2 financial years. It may be followed by an SGA, in which concrete actions, timing, performance indicators, staffing and resources are specified for one financial year of the NGO.

An FPA does not imply any financial commitment. This is the reason why financial coherence is not one of the Award Criteria defined in the call for proposals, and why no detailed budget breakdown needs to be submitted.

¹ LIFE Multiannual Work Programme for 2018-2020 (2018/210/EU)

² COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING DECISION of 12.02.2018 C(2018) serving as financing decision for 2018

4) Question: Do I have to provide financial information in relation to the total budget already in the Call for proposals for FPAs?

Answer: You need to provide a global estimated budget for 2020 and 2021, but without breakdown into cost categories or even single cost items. This will help EASME to determine the funding threshold when there are too many proposals of sufficient quality.

5) Question: What are the highest and lowest amounts for grants?

Answer: The maximum amount that may be awarded by the EASME per year is EUR 700,000 per NGO and 60% of the total eligible expenditure. For organisations that have been awarded an operating grant under the previous SGA call (in this case under the SGA call for proposals to receive funding for the financial year 2019), the maximum amount is limited to the one originally requested for 2019 (as long as it does not go beyond the maximum EUR 700,000 stated above). There is no minimum amount, but as a reference, the average grant for the year 2018 was EUR 330 000.

6) Question: What is the difference between Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) and Specific Grant Agreement (SGA) in relation to details to be provided?

Answer: For the FPA application you will need to provide a detailed description of your biennial strategic plan and support it with an outline of accompanying actions. For the SGA application you will need to explain how the strategic plan will be implemented, so the interlink between the strategy and the actions becomes clear, such as how, when, by whom, etc. they will be carried out. The FPA application should include all the details of the two SGA applications, which will be extracted from it.

7) Question: Can proposals be submitted in other languages than English?

Answer: It is recommended that applicants fill in the technical part of the proposal in English, although proposals may be submitted in any of the official EU languages. Note that the grant agreement, project management files and communication, and formal reporting will have to be in English.

8) Question: Can the reports from the auditors that must be attached to the proposal be presented in other languages than English?

Answer: Yes, all EU languages are accepted, but if English versions are available, attach them to the application as well. A translation does not have to be by a certified translator.

9) Question: Should the documents submitted with the proposal be stapled or not?

Answer: Preferably, the application forms should be submitted un-stapled, whereas the annexes can be stapled.

10) Question: Should audit reports be submitted in original or are copies accepted?

Answer: Audit reports can be submitted as certified copies.

11) Question: What is the legal basis of Operating grants? What is the budget for the current period?

Answer: The legal basis for this call for proposals is the LIFE Regulation (2014-2020) No 1293/2013 as further detailed by the Multi Annual Work Programme for 2018-2020 and by the Commission Implementing Decision of 12 February 2018 on the adoption of the LIFE multiannual work programme for 2018/2020 (2018/210/EU).

12) Question: How will the indicative budget of EUR 12 million be split?

Answer: There is no budget split related to themes covered by proposals. The decisions on the proposals to be funded will be made based on their quality and they will be ranked in one single list.

13) Question: What is preferable, staying in one objective (environment/nature or climate) or to cover both?

Answer: There is no preference in this regard; what is important is the quality of the proposal, be it focused on one area or covering several.

14) Question: Is it a problem for eligibility if the majority of the applicant member organisations are outside of Europe?

Answer: All applicants must fulfil all eligibility criteria as defined in section 5.2 of the call for proposals. Please note also the award criterion 1, which contains a subcriterion on EU added value. NB: members cannot charge any costs (see also Q/A 29).

15) Question: Which third countries are eligible for funding?

Answer: In accordance with Article 5 of the LIFE Regulation, the LIFE Programme shall be open to the participation of the following countries:

(a) European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries which are parties to the Agreement on the European Economic Area (EEA);

- (b) candidate countries, potential candidates and acceding countries to the Union;
- (c) countries to which the European Neighbourhood Policy applies;
- (d) countries which have become members of the European Environmental Agency in accordance with Council Regulation (EC) No 933/1999.

Such participation shall be pursued in accordance with the conditions laid down in the respective bilateral or multilateral agreements establishing the general principles for those third countries' participation in Union programmes. At the moment (March 2019) there is no such agreement with any country outside the EU, and none is under elaboration.

See also the related question on the Brexit and its impact (Q/A 52).

16) Question: As for the obligatory Activity Report that needs to be submitted together with the application (for assessment of technical soundness) – can this be an Activity Report used for other donors?

Answer: The Activity Report should be a yearly report that describes the organisation's activities of the previous year. If the report used for other donors contains a good picture of the activities, it can be used. It can take various forms, and different formats are accepted as long as it gives a sufficient overview of the activities in order to assess the "operational capacity" (see the Call, Section 5.4.2 on this selection criterion). It should be the most recent available report, and it should preferably be in English.

17) Question: The last activity report is a mandatory annex to the grant application. For organisations that were benefitting from an NGO operating grant in 2018: is it acceptable to send the report produced for the purposes of the final payment of the preceding year?

Answer: Yes, it is acceptable, but the activity report should reflect the overall activities of the NGO as a whole – i.e. if the work programme co-funded by the NGO operating grant only represents a smaller proportion of the NGO's complete portfolio, it is preferable to attach the usual yearly activity report of the organisation.

18) Question: The call for proposals mentions that the 'annual activity report of the previous year' should be submitted. Does this imply that the applicant should exist for at least one year?

Answer: No. The applicant NGO must submit its latest activity report to allow the assessment of its eligibility. If the applicant is a newly created entity that has less than one year of existence, it is acceptable that the activity report covers less than 12 months. This applies also for an NGO that was created by another existing NGO as a new legal entity (see also Q/A 19).

19) Question: For newly established NGOs which have less than a year of existence, what kind of documents should we submit instead of the Annual Activity Report and the Audit certificate?

Answer: Exceptionally for new entities/networks, the following documents may be submitted (Call Section 5.4.1):

1.

- The NGO's business plan (or equivalent);

- In case of exceptional circumstances, notably regarding a new network created by pre-existing organisations, EASME may grant derogation of the requirement of supporting documents referring to the two previous years and request the applicants to demonstrate their financial capacity in any other way, by submitting for example:

- The NGO's provisional budget;
- Supporting documents such as an appropriate statement from a bank, a tax declaration, a certificate from national authorities stating that social charges were paid on time, etc.
- If the NGO cannot submit any of those, or the outcome of the analysis is not satisfactory, EASME could request the organisation to submit a financial guarantee provided by a bank or an approved financial institution. Alternatively, one or several of the founding member organisations could act as a guarantor, after acceptance by the Agency and verification of its financial viability (a financial guarantee would have to be submitted by this third party).

2. The table provided in the application form (Financial Capacity form – F), filled in with the relevant statutory accounting figures (or figures from the business plan). See section 5.4.1 of the Call, Financial capacity.

20) Question: Is the fact of having three offices in three different EU member States sufficient to fulfil the eligibility criterion?

Answer: Yes, this is considered satisfactory according to the rules of the current call for proposals. This can be demonstrated by your statutes.

21) Question: In the context of the eligibility criteria, what is meant by “independent”?

Answer: It means independent, both financially and politically, from government authorities and from political parties or commercial interests. For instance, the national/local authorities (or political parties) should not be part to the decision making process. This is normally proved by the organisation's statutes or visible from the board composition.

22) Question: How can we prove the EU dimension and independence of our NGO?

Answer: Applicants are asked to provide EASME with official documents, such as the statutes of the organisation, which will be analysed to check its compliance with the eligibility criteria. Other sources may be consulted, such as the NGO's website and activity reports.

23) Question: Can a non-profit organisation that is financed by "private commercial entities" apply for funding?

Answer: It would be eligible only if its independence can be proved.

24) Question: What are the requirements for the narrative reporting?

Answer: A form for the final activity report is available on the web page: <https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/life-reporting>. The reporting should be based on the information that has been presented in the application and included in the signed contract. The activities carried out should be described, and in case some were not fully carried out, an explanation should be given. Furthermore, results and impacts should be reported.

25) Question: Is there any chance for a small NGO with an annual budget < 100 000 € to have access to the LIFE operating grants, or is it addressed only to larger organisations?

Answer: In principle there is no formal limit to the size or budget of NGOs that participate in the programme. On the NGOs funded so far, including the EU funding received, please consult the LIFE website: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/funding/ngos/list_ngos.htm. However, it is a fact that quite some NGOs financed by LIFE operating grants are large networks or platforms with activities and structures that cover several EU countries (please see eligibility criterion 5 in the Call). Others are specialised on very focused topics, so it is also important to note that it is the quality of the application and not the number of thematic areas it covers that matters for the selection.

Being a small NGO, it may check its suitability with the award criteria, in particular 1 (EU added value), 2 (contribution to EU policy making) and 3 (implementation of EU policies), as the applicant organisation will certainly compete with larger ones. As a point of reference, the average amount of awarded grants last year was 330,000 €.

26) Question: How much time will we have to submit the SGA proposal?

Answer: around 4 weeks.

27) Question: How do we set and quantify performance indicators?

Answer: Performance indicators can be of two kinds: related to results or impacts – contributions to policies or directives, results of study quoted in policy paper, court cases triggered to enforce EU environmental/ climate law, etc. – and related to outputs – concrete deliverables such as stakeholder consultation participation (how many?), contributions in expert groups (number?), no. of position papers submitted, no. of participants (representing target groups xyz) attracted etc. It is recommended to include both types of indicators in the proposal, possibly highlighting the link between them.

28) Question: It seems that with the Juncker priorities also in LIFE there is an emphasis on business dimension and social economic objectives, does this also apply for the NGO operating grants?

Answer: The NGOs operating grants are not particularly aimed at achieving growth and jobs as a priority. Nevertheless, there is recently more emphasis on results and impacts for all EU programmes. Like all other LIFE strands, NGOs are also expected to make a difference on the field, and these results must be quantified as much as possible.

29) Question: Can members be funded? What about subcontracting for members?

Answer: The NGO operating grant is a mono-beneficiary grant. Only the applicant NGO, if selected, will become the beneficiary of the grant and can claim the costs related to the approved work programme. Therefore, costs incurred by entities affiliated to the NGO or its members are not eligible. If in certain circumstances, the beneficiary NGO is sub-contracting tasks to its member(s) to implement a limited part of its work programme, this would need to be sufficiently justified. In particular, the procurement rules must be respected: the contract must be awarded to the bid offering best value for money or the lowest price, avoiding conflicts of interests, and this should be allowed / foreseen in its procurement procedure (see also point 8.9(c) of the call).

30) Question: Can we include activities that are not linked to environmental / climate policies?

Answer: Such activities are not relevant to the objectives of this call, therefore in principle they should not be inserted in the proposal.

31) Question: What do you mean by structure and activities covering at least three EU member States?

Answer: Applicants will have to demonstrate a structure and activities covering at least three EU Member States. To this end, partnerships, networks and memberships are eligible if they are formally established as a legal entity. Partnerships, networks and memberships must be represented by a management board or any other administrative forum that is mandated by its members to represent the entity at EU level and is responsible for the activities of the network. Statutes and/or activity reports of memberships, partnerships or networks will serve as evidence for the structure and activities covering at least three countries (section 5.2 of the Call, Eligibility criteria).

32) Question: If the NGO is also the beneficiary of an action grant, can it claim overheads for that project?

Answer: It is the responsibility of the NGO beneficiaries to ensure that the costs covered by the LIFE operating grant are not funded twice by EU funds. Please also consult the grant agreement of the action grant.

33) Question: Will the percentage of EU funding requested make a difference in the evaluation?

Answer: There are two instances where the requested percentage of EU funding is taken into account:

1. in the assessment of the proposal against award criterion 5 (organisational development), particularly in case of dependence of the NGO from the operating grant, to determine whether the NGO is decreasing its dependence;
2. in case of proposals on the funding threshold with the same score, second priority will be given to applications with a lower percentage of EU funding requested compared to their total eligible costs.

34) Question: How shall we structure the proposal, by theme or by type of activity?

Answer: This can be done at your best convenience.

35) Question: our organisation carries out a voluntary auditing which is not carried out by certified auditors. Can this be accepted as an audit under the call specifications or not?

Answer: This cannot be accepted. For grants over 100,000 €, the annual accounts submitted with the proposal must be certified by an audit report which must be performed by an approved external auditor (i.e. an officially registered auditor in accordance with the international auditing standards and codes of ethics). The auditor should be independent from the applying organisation and not involved in the management of the organisation. It

should be listed in one of the registers of auditors approved by Member States to carry out statutory audits of accounting documents.

36) Question: I was not able to attend the information day but my NGO intends to submit an application for LIFE NGO funding this year. Is it possible to get the information (presentations, etc.) from the information day?

Answer: You can find the relevant information and files, including the info-day presentations and video on our website: <https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/section/life/calls-proposals>

37) Question: If an applicant organisation does not have a network of members, but works with a number of partners through memorandums of understanding or other forms of agreement, is it then eligible for the NGO grant? And if so, do these partners need to be listed in form A4?

Answer: Only structured memberships or legally registered networks can be taken into account for the LIFE operating grants. According to the eligibility rules (Section 5 of the Call):

Applicants will have to demonstrate a structure and activities covering at least three European Union Member States. To this end, partnerships, networks and memberships are eligible if they are formally established as a legal entity. Partnerships, networks and memberships must be represented by a management board or any other administrative forum that is mandated by its members to represent the entity at EU level and is responsible for the activities of the network.

So-called "loose co-operations" or temporary partnerships are not eligible under this call.

Memberships comprise exclusively legal entities, i.e. not natural persons. All members must be listed in the application. Only the applicant NGO, if selected, will become the single beneficiary of the grant and can claim costs. Therefore, costs incurred by entities affiliated to the NGO are not eligible. See also Section 13.7 (c).

Statutes and/or activity reports of memberships, partnerships or networks will serve as evidence for the structure and activities covering at least three countries.

If there is no structured relationship between the applicant and its partners, it would be difficult to prove that they are bound together. A memorandum is not as binding as the organisation's statutes. Therefore it seems that the organisation would not meet eligibility criterion 5.

38) Question: Please send us some explanation on the eligibility criterion 5 of this call. In particular, the paragraph:

"Applicants will have to demonstrate a structure and activities covering at least three European Union Member States. To this end, partnerships, networks and memberships are eligible if they are formally established as a legal entity. Partnerships, networks and memberships must be represented by a management board or any other administrative forum that is mandated by its members to represent the entity at EU level and is responsible for the activities of the network"

Can the request and approval of the foreign NGOs we work with (by the governing Council of our NGO) be considered as a proof that the foreign legal entities are members of the NGO?

Answer: As you can see in the Call text, the members of any applicant NGO must be proven by an official document as evidence that the NGO covers at least three EU countries. This could be for example the NGO's statutes, or the minutes of a meeting of the NGO's governing board establishing the membership, or even the membership fees paid by the members. The applicant NGO must be officially representing its members. A simple request and approval (for instance by email) would not be a sufficient proof as it does not constitute an official document. Please also note that in this context "member" does not refer to natural persons.

39) Question: Is the LIFE operating grants call addressed only to NGOs that have a partnership agreement with EASME or also to NGOs that are not part of the agreement?

Answer: The current call for proposals is open to all NGOs that meet the eligibility criteria. The ones that will be selected will sign a framework partnership agreement for the next two years (2020 and 2021). Therefore, the NGOs that will not be selected this year for signing a framework partnership agreement will also not be able to participate next year.

40) Question: What is meant by 'area' under section T4.2 in the technical forms? The title page of the T Section refers to policy areas, whereas the headings under T4.2 refer to "areas". Please can you clarify what is expected here?

Answer: In many cases, but not all, the work areas of NGOs are grouped by policies tackled. The application forms were deliberately left open for the NGOs to structure their proposal according to their usual work and convenience. Please choose the most suitable structure for your particular case. In both cases (work areas/policy areas), of course, the links of work programme/activities to EU policies should be described, as this is an award criterion for the selection of proposals (AW1).

41) Question: The members of our network are local municipalities. Are we eligible for the LIFE NGO grant?

Answer: If your network is composed of public authorities such as local, regional or national governments, the entity cannot be considered as independent from public authorities and as such it does not comply with eligibility criterion 2.

42) Question: Can you explain the difference between objectives, expected results, impact, deliverables, indicators... or better give a synthetic definition?

Answer: A deliverable is a concrete output of your actions (the most usual deliverables are the reports and documentary evidence of your activities) while an indicator is a more generic measure of your progress. You should use indicators to measure your success or progress and to prove with this that you are able to achieve change. Of course you should start with outcomes linked to the results you want to achieve – such as new regulations / amendments / implementation of existing regulation. A more sophisticated and telling proof of success (but also more effort-some to measure) can be assessed by conducting specific measurements, surveys or interviews, sometimes using a before-/after- study. These surveys could indicate if you managed to bring across your message to the target groups, whether the target groups might have changed their behavior or took into account your policy recommendations etc. or whether your activities led to a reduction of negative environmental impacts or similar. Please find below some general definitions and corresponding examples.

- Objectives: overarching aims of the organisation, such as the elimination of sea litter, reducing GHG, halt biodiversity loss, working towards a circular economy, etc.
- Outputs: specific deliverables of the activities such as a new database, a new website, press articles, position papers, meetings with MEPs/EC, etc.
- Outcomes/Results: immediate effects of the activities such as percentage or number of stakeholders informed, regulations/directives reviewed, etc.
- Impact: intended outcome of the activities on the wider environmental context including impacts beyond those directly affected by the NGO's action, e.g. behaviour change, reduction of GHG, energy savings, tons of waste redirected from landfill.

43) Question: Is it possible for an NGO that got the LIFE NGO Operating grant to submit proposals under the LIFE action grants?

Answer: It is certainly possible for a beneficiary of an NGO operating grant to apply for an action grant. However, please note that it is not possible to claim the overhead costs for the same activities that are funded by operating grants in the same period of time. Beneficiaries receiving an operating grant 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 project (see also question 32).

44) Question: In order to apply for a grant for NGOs, we should submit among others the annual report and certified accounts of the last two years. However, our report and audit report for the last financial year (2018) will probably not be ready by the application deadline. Therefore, is it possible to include the report and audited accounts from 2016 and 2017 in the application?

Answer: If they are not finalised, you should include the activity reports, accounts and audit for the two last years for which annual accounts are closed (i.e. 2016 and 2017 in the case of your organisation).

45) Question: Is our Albanian NGO eligible to apply for funding under the call "LIFE-NGO- EASME-2019"?

Answer: The call is addressing NGOs established in countries that contribute to the LIFE programme. Therefore, it is de facto only open to NGOs that are registered in the EU Member States. Since Albania is not contributing to the LIFE programme (i.e. there is no Memorandum of Understanding between Albania and the EU in place), its NGOs cannot benefit from these grants.

46) Question: The call differentiates the documentation needed for the application depending on the amount of the grant requested (<60.000, from 60.000 to 100.000, >100.000); does this amount refer to the two years covering the full duration of the FPA, or to the budget foreseen for the activities of one year (corresponding to the eventual Specific Grant Agreement)?

Answer: The thresholds refer to the annual requested grant.

47) Question: Should the "Declaration on honour" (exclusion criteria) be attached as a separate supporting document (as per the "checklist and list of supporting documents")?

Answer: The declaration on honour is in fact Form A1 of the FPA administrative application forms and is part of the supporting documents to be provided. Please do not forget to date and sign it.

48) Question: Do we need to provide the "declaration on the honour by the applicant to be used for grants ≤ EUR 60 000" if the grant is above 60.000 €?

Answer: The declaration of honour by the applicant to be used for grants ≤ EUR 60 000 (Form A4) has to be provided only for grant applications with an EU requested funding below or equal to 60.000 €, therefore it should not be provided for grant application with an EU

requested funding above 60.000 €. Instead, other declarations need to be provided – please see Section 5.4 of the Call.

49) Question: In Form A2, under “Statutory registration number”, should we provide the company number (“numéro d’entreprise”) as identification number in Belgium?

Answer: Yes, for NGOs registered in Belgium the "numéro d'entreprise" is the registration number requested in the documents.

50) Question: What is the difference between partnerships, networks and memberships in the meaning of the Call for Proposals? Can networks have natural persons as members?

Answer: As long as the applicant organisation meets all the eligibility criteria, including criterion 5 (be operating at EU level with a structure and activities covering at least three EU member states), it does not matter if it also has individual members (natural persons). However, at least three official members should be legal entities established in three different EU countries. Please note that the structural coverage should be proved, for instance through the organisation's statutes or governing board. The applicant can be either an umbrella-type organisation with affiliates in different countries or a member of a network composed of peer NGOs.

51) Question: Can in kind contributions be considered eligible as co-funding sources – e.g. could we waive part of the salaries?

Answer: In-kind contributions cannot be used to co-finance the grant. They would be considered as a non-eligible part of the applicant's budget.

52) Question: Can organisations based in the UK take part in this Call?

Answer: If the United Kingdom withdraws from the EU during the period of the Framework Partnership Agreement without concluding an agreement with the EU ensuring in particular that British applicants continue to be eligible, British beneficiaries will cease to receive EU funding under any specific grant agreement on the basis of Article II.17.2.2 of General Conditions to the Framework Partnership Agreement.