

NATIONAL FOCAL POINT FOR BULGARIA ANNOUNCES OPEN CALL FOR PROPOSALS

UNDER THE FUND FOR BILATERAL RELATIONS AT NATIONAL LEVEL WITHIN THE EEA FM AND NFM 2009-2014

I. Objectives of the Fund for Bilateral Relations at National Level (FBRNL), thematic areas, results and outcomes

The Monitoring of EU Funds Directorate (MEUFD) at the Council of Ministers acts as the National Focal Point (NFP) within the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism (EEA FM and NFM) 2009-2014. Based on the Regulations on the implementation of the EEA FM and NFM 2009-2014 (hereinafter referred to as “Regulations”) and the Agreement for the financing of Technical Assistance and Fund for Bilateral Relations at National Level, the NFP has been entrusted with the implementation of the FBRNL.

The objective of the FBRNL within the EEA FM and NFM 2009-2014 is to promote and strengthen bilateral relations between the Republic of Bulgaria and the Donor states in priority areas of common interest to share knowledge, expertise, good practices and achieve shared results.

The initiatives under the FBRNL must foster co-operation through partnerships, shared outcomes of jointly identified solutions to specific problems, and better mutual awareness and understanding between the Donor States and the Republic of Bulgaria. They must also have broader impact (wider effects) beyond the scope of the programmes under the EEA FM and NFM 2009-2014.

Projects submitted under this Call for Proposals shall address the objective by establishing/enhancing cooperation between Bulgarian and Donor state partners for joint implementation of activities, exchange of good practices, transfer of donor expertise and know-how in the following two thematic areas (priorities) of strategic importance where specific mutual interest and common concern have been identified:

- **Priority 1: Knowledge exchange in combating drugs and organized crime, children and youth at risk;**
- **Priority 2: Promotion of European values and in particular history teaching in multicultural society**

The initiatives financed under both priorities of the FBRNL are expected:

- to lead to more efficient and effective responses to one or more challenges under the thematic areas at local, regional or national level with assistance from a donor partner institution or organisation through the transfer of and/or exchange of good practices, expertise and know-how;
- to facilitate and accelerate solution of thematic areas challenges faced by Bulgarian and Donor partner institutions;

- to improve the sustainability of solutions to challenges under the thematic areas addressed with the support of the partnership

In connection to the expected outcomes of bilateral cooperation, the National Focal Point has defined the following main qualitative and quantitative indicators for strengthening bilateral relations under the two thematic areas:

- Number of partnership agreements between institutions/organisations in Bulgaria and Donor states concluded;
- Number of new practices, technologies acquainted with and/or applied, as a result of bilateral cooperation;
- Improved benefits through access to valuable professional or technical skills;
- Number of organised joint events as a result of bilateral cooperation;
- Number of participants in organised joint events;
- Number of studies, analyses, publications on topics within the thematic areas conducted or developed;
- Number of promotional /information initiatives conducted;
- Number of people trained on topics within the thematic areas

All initiatives supported under the FBRNL need to promote the following cross-cutting issues:

- **Good governance** – participation and inclusiveness of all relevant stakeholders in the different phases of project development and implementation including accountability, transparency, effectiveness and efficiency of project activities;
- **Sustainability** – from social, economic as well as environmental perspective. Cooperation activities shall respect the need to incorporate requirements of sustainability;
- **Gender equality** – avoiding discrimination on the grounds of gender; equal opportunities for men and women as well as taking into consideration of specific needs

II. Financial allocation

The budgetary allocation to the Grant Scheme under **Priority 1** is **EUR 120 000**.

The budgetary allocation to the Grant Scheme under **Priority 2** is **EUR 100 000**.

The Call for Proposals is of the type “rolling call” which means that the NFP will review and assess the submitted proposals on quarterly basis. This procedure will take place in the period since the launching of the Call for Proposals until **15 December 2014**. Qualifying projects will be accepted on a first come – first serve basis. Subsequent calls will be announced if the number of qualified proposals received does not utilize the total amount available in both priorities or there is a need for re-allocation of funds.

III. Project characteristics

Minimum total amount of the grant: **EUR 5 000**

Maximum total amount of the grant: **EUR 30 000**

Grants from the FBRNL may be up to **100%** of total eligible project costs. No co-financing is required.

Projects have to be implemented in a time span of up to 12 months.

Partnership initiatives may be implemented either on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria or part of the project activities be carried out in the Donor states.

IV. Eligible beneficiaries

Projects have to be implemented in partnership with Donor State organisations/institutions. Eligible beneficiaries (project promoters) can be legal entities registered in Bulgaria. Donor project partners will help shape approaches and activate response capacity to deal with challenges under both thematic areas, transmit know-how and best practices, support learning and methodology development processes.

Eligible beneficiaries under the two thematic areas of the FBRNL are as follows:

- Programme Operators (POs) according to the Memoranda of Understanding on the implementation of EEA FM and NFM 2009-2014 within whose competence the thematic areas fall;
- Ministries and other state institutions in charge of implementing national policies in the field of the two thematic areas;
- Primary and secondary schools, universities and research organizations;
- Local and regional authorities;
- Not-for-profit organizations registered under the Non-Profit Legal Entities Act

V. Partnership and role of the project partner(s)

It is obligatory for the beneficiaries to involve a partner organisation from the donor states in project preparation and implementation. Eligible project partners under this Call for Proposals are organisations from the Donor States and Bulgaria, if applicable, which are properly constituted and registered legal entities in their country and meet the same requirements as for the eligible beneficiaries described above. Project partners can spend money for implementation of project activities in line with the approved project budget which will be reimbursed by the beneficiary.

VI. Eligibility of projects

Projects shall comply with the objectives of the FBRNL defined above and shall not include activities already financed by other sources.

Eligible beneficiaries have to choose only one thematic area (priority) that applies to their project proposal.

One beneficiary/project partner can be awarded only one grant under both priorities.

VII. Procurement and *de minimis* aid regime

If the beneficiary/partner has to conclude contracts in order to carry out the project, it shall comply with the national procurement legislation.

The project grants under the present Call for Proposals will be provided in compliance with the “*de minimis*” rules laid down in the Commission Regulation (EC) No 1998/2006 of 15 December 2006 on the application of Article 87 and 88 of the Treaty to *de minimis* aid (OJ, L 379/28.12.2006).

VIII. Eligible activities

Under the FBRNL financial support will be provided for short range initiatives, informative activities, complementary and supportive initiatives with the aim to create or strengthen the base for present or future cooperation within the thematic areas identified. The following types of activities are eligible under the two thematic areas of the FBRNL:

- joint conferences, seminars and workshops on topics within the thematic areas;
- capacity building and short term training in view of exchange and implementation of professional or organisational skills;
- study trips, visits and meetings with the aim of sharing experience and know-how in the thematic areas;
- jointly developed reports, analyses, surveys, studies and publications on topics within the thematic areas ;
- campaigns, exhibitions and promotional initiatives for strengthening bilateral partnerships;
- better mutual understanding and knowledge to be achieved about the country in the country of the other project partner

POs shall apply only for activities that are not eligible under the management costs, bilateral funds at programme level and complementary actions of the respective programmes within the EEA FM and NFM 2009-2014.

Eligible project activities should be completed till 31 October 2016.

IX. Eligible expenditures

The following types of expenditures are eligible:

1) Eligible direct costs

Expenditures which are identified by the project promoter or the project partner(s), in accordance with project promoter's/project partners' accounting principles and usual internal rules, as specific expenditures directly linked to the implementation of the project and which can therefore be booked to it directly.

In particular, the following types of expenditures may be eligible:

- Costs for remuneration of experts (expert fees) assigned for the activities performed by the project promoter/partner(s), corresponding to the gross remuneration plus the social security and health insurance contributions incurred by the employer and the other costs related to them as per the national legislation;
- Fees, travel (including subsistence allowances) and accommodation costs related to participation in conferences, seminars, training courses, workshops, study visits;
- Costs related to conducting studies and analyses;
- Costs of conferences, seminars and workshops (rent of facilities, catering, interpretation and translation of working materials, etc.);
- Costs related to promotional and informational activities for strengthening bilateral relations;
- Costs entailed by other contracts awarded by a project promoter for the purposes of carrying out the project, provided that the awarding complies with the applicable rules on public procurement;



- Costs arising directly from requirements imposed by the project implementation agreement (for example for implementation of the information and publicity requirements, costs of issuing an auditor's statement as a proof of costs incurred by a donor project partner, etc.)

2) *Indirect costs in projects (overheads)*

Indirect costs of the project shall represent a fair apportionment of the overall overheads of the project promoter/partner. They may be identified according to either of the following methods:

a) based on actual indirect costs for those project promoters/partners that have an analytical accounting system to identify their indirect costs as indicated above. In this case the indirect costs may be up to 15% of the total direct eligible costs.

b) project promoter/partner may opt for a flat rate of up to 15 % on the eligible costs mentioned above. The amount of the eligible indirect costs shall be determined on the basis of the approved fixed percentage multiplied by the total amount of the direct eligible costs less the amount of the direct costs for awarding of activities to subcontractors.

X. First and final dates of eligibility of expenditure

Costs within projects will be eligible from the date set in the project implementation agreement. The project implementation agreement shall set the final date of eligibility of costs, which shall be no later than 31 October 2016. Costs are deemed to be incurred within the dates of eligibility if the costs are invoiced, and the subject matter (goods, services) of the costs is delivered, within the said dates.

XI. Application procedure

The full application package is available and can be downloaded from the website of the NFP at the following address: <http://www.eeagrants.bg>.

The application package shall be submitted in 2 hard copies duly signed (one original and one copy of all submitted documents) and a CD identical to the hard copies to the NFP through the Document Control Department with the Council of Ministers. Applications must be submitted in a sealed envelope by registered mail or a courier service (the date of the post office stamp or express courier receipt will be considered as proof of the date of sending), or by hand delivery to the Document Control Department at the address below:

***Monitoring of EU Funds Directorate
Council of Ministers of Republic of Bulgaria
1 Dondukov Blvd, 1194 Sofia, Bulgaria***

The deadline for submission of applications is **5 p.m. (local time) on December 15th, 2014**.

XII. Assessment of applications and awarding of grants

The selection of projects is carried out in three stages: all submitted applications are reviewed for compliance with the administrative and eligibility criteria, qualitative assessment and final decision making.

The submitted applications will be screened for eligibility and administrative compliance by the experts of NFP. In order to move on to the next evaluation stage, the proposals must fulfill all of the administrative and eligibility criteria listed in the Guidelines for Grant Applicants. Beneficiaries that do not conform to the formal/administrative and eligibility criteria will be

informed in writing by the NFP. If any shortcomings are found concerning the formal and administrative criteria, these can be corrected by the beneficiary. Beneficiaries whose applications have been rejected at this stage of evaluation may appeal to the Head of the NFP.

Applications meeting the formal and administrative criteria, as well as the eligibility criteria, will then be subject to a qualitative assessment organised by NFP. Each application will be reviewed by two experts defined by NFP according to the criteria and rating scale described in the Guidelines for Grant Applicants. The project final score will be the average of the project scores received by both evaluators. A project proposal may be approved for funding, if the overall evaluation score at the stage of qualitative assessment equals to at least 60 points. After the assessment of the applications has been performed the project proposals will be ranked according to the score received. The final grant decision will be taken by the Selection Committee. The Selection Committee comprises representatives from the NFP, the Royal Norwegian Embassy and external thematic experts, if needed. Applications of Programme Operators within the EEA FM and NFM 2009-2014 that have applied for activities eligible under the management costs, bilateral fund at programme level or complementary actions under the respective programme might be rejected by the Selection Committee.

Project promoters will be notified of the decision of the Selection Committee. The NFP will send a Grant Offer Letter to the successful project promoters. On the basis of an acceptance from the project promoter and as a result of a conducted procedure for lack of double-financing by NFP a project implementation agreement will be concluded.

XIII. Documents related to the Open Call for Proposals

- Guidelines for Grant Applicants under the Fund for Bilateral Relations at National Level;
- Regulation on the implementation of the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism 2009-2014;
- Regulation on the implementation of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009-2014;
- Guidelines for Strengthened Bilateral Relations (EEA and Norway Grants 2009-2014)

Additional information about the FBRNL and the Call for Proposals is available at www.eegrants.bg. All applicants are advised to carefully read the Guidelines for Grant Applicants before starting an application process.

Potential project promoters may submit questions in relation to the Call for Proposals by sending an e-mail to the following address: G.Mladenova@government.bg. Answers will be published on the NFP's website www.eegrants.bg "Bilateral Fund" section within 10 working days. The NFP will give only principle answers to the questions and will not give prior opinion on the eligibility of specific activities and costs.

Inquiries in relation to the FBRNL could be addressed to:

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