

## **Group of Funders meeting The Hague, 19-20 April 2018, at NWO**

### **Information on procedures**

This information summarises the role of the independent International Review Panel (IRP) and of the allocation procedure of the Group of Funders meeting. The meeting has been prepared by the managers of LEAP-Agri (ANR and MOEST) in collaboration with the Call Secretariat (NWO-WOTRO, NRF and DLR-PT). Detailed information is available in the Consortium Agreement, the Terms of Reference for the IRP and the Call for Proposals. The main objective of this GF meeting is to allocate funding.

#### **International Review Panel meeting**

##### **Full proposal stage preparation**

The following main steps have been taken, with the 85 proposals received:

- The 83 eligible proposals have been sent to three reviewers each;
- The main applicants had the opportunity to write a rebuttal on the reviews;
- The members of the IRP were asked to prepare a report on around 14 proposals assigned to them (pre-assessment with scoring). The IRP bases a report on a weighing of a proposal, the three review reports and the rebuttal.

##### **IRP meeting 16-18 April**

The panel consists of 20 members and additionally two technical co-chairs. During the IRP meeting also the general management of LEAP-Agri will be present as well as an independent observer (required by the EC). The CS will explain the procedure.

All IRP members prepare the meeting as follows:

- All pre-assessment reports have been distributed among the IRP members;
- An excel file has been made with the preliminary ranking, based on the 3 pre-assessment reports per proposal by IRP members;
- A division is made of the proposals in 3 categories based on the preliminary ranking: green (high ranking by all preliminary assessors), white (intermediate group, most discussed) and red (not discussed plenary but in small groups).

The IRP is informed by the chairs about the following measures:

- The conflict of interest is checked again.
- The whole procedure/outcome is confidential. If IRP members receive questions from applicants or others, please refer them to the CS.
- The evaluation of proposals should be based on the focus and criteria of the call, taking into account the review reports and the rebuttal.
- They should also take into consideration whether or not the IRP comments from the outline proposal phase were sufficiently incorporated in the full proposal.
- Neither the preliminary proposal itself nor the ranking are to be taken into account.
- The pre-assessment reports should especially relate to the review reports and rebuttal.
- Reports about decision: justification is crucial. If not sufficiently detailed in the preliminary assessments additional arguments are required; for a number of proposals there is a lack of (coherent) arguments, which are necessary to communicate the ranking and result to the Group of Funders and the applicants.
- Disciplines must be judged on the basis of their own characteristics and judgments may not take place based on paradigms; it is important to realize that

accepted methods, theories and publication requirements differ within different fields -> open attitude of IRP members for everyone's expertise is needed.

### **Monday 16 April**

- The proposals in category red are divided between 4-5 small groups to be discussed by the IRP
- The chairs prepare the meeting with the CS, looking at each project for specific points: e.g. comments on review reports, differences between reviewers , differences between pre-assessments IRP.

### **Tuesday 17 April**

Plenary discussion of each proposal in the green and white category separately, followed by (re)scoring.

Before and during the meeting reviewing and ranking will be done according to the following scoring scheme after the discussion of each proposal.

1,0-1,4	1,5-3,4	3,5-5,4	5,5- 7,4	7,5-9,0
Excellent	Very good	Good	Reasonable	Weak

- Proposals scoring on average > 3,4 for one or more of the criteria would normally not be considered for awarding.
- Ranking is based upon equal weighing of the three main criteria: 1) Excellence of the proposal 2) Expected impact of the project 3) Quality and efficiency of the implementation.
- Each proposal in the white and green category will be discussed separately in the plenary meeting of Tuesday.
- All IRP members score all proposals in the green and white category (unless there is a Conflict of Interest). After each discussion the IRP members score.

Tuesday after the meeting and in the evening the CS will make a new ranking on the basis of the new scores of the IRP. This new ranking is the starting point for Wednesday.

### **Wednesday 18 April**

In the morning plenary discussion on ranking and agreement on selection of proposals:

- The final ranking is shown and discussed, including the cut-off point based on the total of available finances.
- The GoF is not allowed to deviate from the IRP ranking, following EC rules.
- Each proposal will be financed by at least 4 funders (as each funder finances the budget by the researchers employed in their country).
- Decision on funding is depending on the finances per country and therefore the ranking may pose a problem, in case some countries have already spent their money in the ranking.
- The IRP is therefore asked to allow for a shared ranking of proposals (block ranking) around the cut-off point, so that the GoF can make a choice for those proposals based on funding options. This only applies to proposals eligible for funding (with scoring excellent or very good).
- General reflections/preview on follow-up

In the afternoon: Writing of reports, each IRP members will be assigned a number of reports (4 or 5), to write them in the afternoon, to be checked by the CS and added to the report of the IRP meeting. The reports of a proposal is send to the main applicant.

### **Final Preparation Group of Funders meeting on the next days**

The CS will prepare the GF meeting, finalising the powerpoint with the final ranking, and including information for each funder on their positions in the ranking.

## Group of Funders Meeting

The procedure will be explained again at the start of the GF in a powerpoint, including the final consensus ranking by the IRP and the calculation table mentioned below.

The following general rules apply to the granting procedure meeting:

- The GF cannot deviate from the ranking by the IRP (EC regulation).
- The top-up therefore needs to be used to bridge financing gaps in the ranking (as agreed in the Consortium Agreement).
- It is important to realise that in case financing for one proposal stops, it will not be possible to continue with the next place in the ranking.
- Therefore the IRP will be asked to also use block ranking (proposals with a similar place in the ranking), after the ranking of proposals with the highest scores. Within the same block ranking a choice can be made between the proposals. But it is not possible to continue with proposals that are ranked after the block, if not all proposals within the block have been financed.
- The following information from the Consortium Agreement is important in this respect:
  - The Parties agree to use a mixed mode financing system to compensate cases where participating funding agencies have exhausted their budget at different points in the ranking list.
  - A minimum of 50% of the EU-Top-up Funding for Co-Funded Projects will be reserved for financial balancing purposes in order to fill potential gaps in the ranking list resulting from insufficient funding of a Party, in order to avoid blockage in the funding of transnational projects resulting from the ranking lists.
  - If more than 50 % of the EU-Top-up Funding for Co-Funded Projects is needed for balancing purposes in order to maximise the number of Transnational Projects that can be funded, this percentage may be further increased by a decision of the Group of Funders.
  - The remaining amount will be shared using a fixed reimbursement rate among the Parties with Trans-national Projects proposed for funding.
  - Countries contributing more than 500.000€ shall not receive from the EU-Top-Up more than 100 % of their own contribution effectively spent on Trans-national Projects.
- The block ranking is hopefully agreed upon by the IRP: the choices will first of all need to be based upon availability of funding of the four countries per project (not yet looking at the total of funding available), which may lead to 2 different situations:
  - I. The availability of funding for each project in the block may lead to too many projects that could in principle be funded in total (when only looking at each project separately), which means that additional choices have to be made on which projects to fund.  
The choices for funding in the block are proposed to be based upon the following criteria:
    - What countries are not yet or not sufficiently included in the granted projects so far;
    - What foci are underrepresented;
    - The spreading of the top-up among funders as much as possible.
  - II. It may also lead to insufficient funding of projects by specific partners, so that not all the money can be spend: then the financing should be maximised according the same criteria mentioned above.
- It should be noted that in case not all the funding is or can be used, this means that the top-up will also be less.

### **Calculation table**

During the GF meeting the funders will be informed in a calculation table displayed on a screen visible for the plenary about the outcome of the IRP meeting, and what this means for the financing of the projects. Below (next page) a part of the table is included for your information, indicating the data that will be available.

The allocation of funding will be based on and around this calculation table. The consequences of financing a project immediately become apparent, due to the calculation system 'behind' the excel file.

For each respective funder the information is provided in 9 columns. In the example below, which displays an extraction of the overall table, these are the *columns D to L*. The total number of columns for each of the 24 funders in LEAP-Agri is 216, with which means that it is not possible that during the GF all columns can be displayed in one overview. This will need to be dealt with during the meeting.

The proposal's ID, the IRP ranking and the proposals allocated for funding by the GF will be displayed in further columns in the overall calculation table (these columns have been left out in the extracted table below).

During the meeting the LEAP-Agri Team will move between the columns according to the needs, so that the appropriate columns become visible on the screen.

Within a first round, the funders will be asked to confirm their funding commitment given in the consortium agreement in 2016 or to state changes (including additional funding). In *cell D1 or D2* reductions or additional budget will be noted so that in *D3* the current commitment of the respective funder will occur. In *cell D5* the total of all applicants who are requesting budget from this specific funder will be displayed.

In *column E* the respective budget requests will be displayed in each proposal in which this specific funder is asked for funding.

In *cell F5* the total number of applicants will be displayed and in *cell G5* the total number of projects of all applicants who are asking this specific funder for a budget (it is possible that two different applicants are asking the same funder in the same proposal).

In *column H* the budget requested from this specific funder will be accumulated with each proposal.

In *column I* the remaining budget from this specific funder for following proposals will be calculated. The cell will turn into colour Red in case the specific funder does not have enough budget available for funding this applicant anymore. At this point the GF will discuss options for topping up these proposals with further budget. In *column J* a subsidiary top up from the EC budget will be noted and in *cell J5* the total of the EC budget used as top up in proposals addressing this specific funder, will be calculated. In *column K* the projects that are suggested to be funded will be highlighted, so that in *cell K5* the total of all those proposals could be calculated.

*Column L* is for comments during the GF (if necessary to record them) and to note e.g. sources of subsidiary budgets coming from other funders.

The relevant general information about each respective proposal will be displayed in *columns A,B and C*. *Column A* will inform about the total budget of the respective proposal, requested from different funders. *Column B* will highlight the general need for gap filling in each respective proposal and in *column C* the general need for gap filling will be displayed in an accumulated manner, so that the GF could identify the general preliminary limit of the proposals that could be funded.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
1				X € = reduction of fund							
2				X € = additional fund							
3				X €	Funding Commitment 2018	Funding Commitment 2016	X €	[Country – Funder]			
4											
5				X €		X	X			X €	X
6	<b>Total Consortium's budget</b>	<b>Need for Gap Filling per Proposal</b>	<b>ACCUMULATED Need for Gap Filling per Proposal</b>	↑ Total Requested Budget	Totals Budgets per Proposal ↓	↑ No. of Applicants	↑ No. of Projects	Accumulated Total of requested Budget	Remaining Budget per Funder for the following Proposals [€]	EC Top-Up (GF Decision) [€]	Projects to be funded
7	X €	X €	X €		X €	X	X	X €	X €	X €	X

Once the funding decisions have been made, the CS will provide each funder with all information about the applicants in an excel file as soon as possible.

### Steps to be taken shortly after the GF meeting

Important information for the procedure after the GF meeting:

- Some funders may need one week to settle additional funding;
- After the final selection of projects to be funded, each Funding Agency will fill the Annex 7 « Commitment on the Availability of Funds » and sign it electronically (after the EC opens the portal);
- The CS will provide an excel file with information to each funder;
- With a mandatory starting date before the end of August 2018, each funder needs to start the procedure within their own organization as soon as possible;
- Each funder needs to write an allocation letter for their financing part of a project, before the ultimate starting date of a project;
- A template for an annex to the allocation letter will be provided, mentioning the requirements for LEAP-Agri (e.g. participation in the workshops).

### Procedure to complete the (EC) funding of projects

At the end of the reporting for the first period (*month 18, then 31/05/2019*), the EC will open the section “periodic reporting” in which ANR (*as coordinating Agency*) will submit the Annex 8 (*Statement of the Use of first pre-financing*) and request the second prefunding.

In order to fill this annex 8, ANR will request each partner to send a financial statement, including the payment they may have given to the co-funded projects. ANR will then compile all Funders data and submit Annex 8 from month 18 to month 20 (*end of July*). The EC will recalculate their funding for this second funding, and would send the total second funding (*including a share of 70-80% of total EC Top-up*) to ANR within two months, then +/- end of September 2018.

ANR will then have to transfer the concerned budget to all Funders, which mean that all Funders may have the EC Funds by the end of year 2018 (*if everything is going on without any problems and without delays from some Funding Agencies*) or beginning of year 2019.

That means that all Funding Agencies should have to start funding the concerned applicants in the co-funded projects with their own budget, and before having received EC funds.

Most of the Funding Agency will not transfer to the applicants the total requested budget at the beginning of the project life, but only a part of this budget. This would allow normally Funding Agencies to start the co-funding of "their" applicants for all concerned co-funded projects with their own budget.

### **Annexes**

Annex 1. Programme GF meeting

Annex 2. Call for full proposals

Annex 3. Practical information