

Evaluation of project proposals in a 2-step application process of calls targeting social services – collection of tools

This tool aims to facilitate the selection and evaluation of project proposals in a 2-step application process in ESF+ programs supporting social services. The 2-step application process has been suggested by social services as a solution to reduce the unnecessary administrative burden of both applicants and Managing Authorities/Intermediary Bodies by pre-filtering project proposals at an early development stage.

Evaluation grid of proposals in 2-step application process – Step 1

When a 2-step application process is chosen in an ESF+ call, especially one supporting social inclusion and innovation, the following evaluation grids can be used in Step 1, adapted as necessary to the nationally used evaluation grids.

The evaluation grids are in line with the 1.2 ESF+ 2-step Application Form template samples.

Step 1

- To reduce administrative burden, in Step 1 the eligibility of applicants should only be checked for the Lead partner (other partners can be changed between Step 1 and 2). Supporting documents to verify the Lead partner's eligibility should only be requested if the information cannot be obtained from public data.
- In Step 1 – in line with Application Form – the project's proposed partnership, objectives, relevance, concept, given solutions, ambition and expected results are to be evaluated.
- Step 1 Evaluation procedure should be simplified with shorter evaluation period and an Evaluation Committee deciding which proposals are recommended for Step 2.
- Step 1 evaluation should give recommendations to Applicants on how to further develop and improve the projects, whether the project moves on to Step 2 or not.
- In the award criteria grid, the sections to be checked in the Application Form can be optionally given, which would allow for self-assessment of proposals.
- Winning project concepts in Step 1 should be offered an information session (Applicants – Managing Authority – evaluators/member of the Evaluation Committee), where the outcome of the evaluation and given recommendations can be discussed to further improve the quality and impact of the project and to significantly reduce the number of rejected projects in Step 2.
- Evaluation grids should be adapted to or complemented with national legislative and call requirements.

Evaluation grids - step 1

Eligibility criteria

Criteria 1-4 are gateway criteria; proposals can only move on to assessment against award criteria if fulfilled upon submission.

	Eligibility Criteria	Description
1	The application was submitted on time. If an IT tool is used for the submission of proposals, it should be automatically checked.	By the deadline set in the call for proposals.
2	All sections of the application are correctly filled in. (There is no incorrect information, e.g., "to be added later".) If an IT tool is used for the submission of proposals, it should be automatically checked.	All fields in the application form are mandatory.
3	The Lead partner is an eligible organisation.	To be verified during eligibility check. Programme to decide the rules, e.g., legal status, territorial eligibility etc. Use the EU ARACHNE tool, if applicable.
4	Supporting documents to verify eligibility of Lead partner are attached, where applicable. If an IT tool is used for the submission of proposals, it should be automatically checked.	Not applicable when automatic check is possible (it can be verified based on publicly available data).

Award criteria

Eligible Step 1 applications will be assessed against the following assessment criteria. Scoring given as an example in the grid below is indicative and should be adapted to national practice. Scoring methodology should be made public and transparent in each call.

Criteria	Sections to be checked in the Application Form (optional)	Scoring
Relevance		40%
1.	How well is a need for the project justified?	
2.	How well does the proposed project contribute to the programme's objectives?	

Partnership		30%
3.	To what extent is the partnership structure relevant for the proposed project?	
Impact		30%
4.	How well and to what extent does the project contribute to the expected results of the programme?	

Evaluation grid of proposals in 2-step application process – Step 2

When a 2-step application process is chosen in an ESF+ call, especially one supporting social inclusion and innovation, the following evaluation grids can be used in Step 2, adapted as necessary to the nationally used evaluation grids. The evaluation grids are in line with the ESF+ 2-step Application Form template samples.

The evaluation grids are in line with the 1.2 ESF+ 2-step Application Form template samples.

Tool user guide

Step 2

- To reduce administrative burden, supporting documents to verify the Applicants' operational and financial capacity should only be requested if the information cannot be obtained from public data.
- Eligibility check should provide room for resubmission of missing, non-technical documents (if applicable).
- In the award criteria grid, the sections to be checked in the Application Form can be optionally given, which would allow for self-assessment of proposals.
- Evaluation grids should be adapted to or complemented with national legislative and call requirements.

Evaluation grids - step 2

Eligibility criteria

Criteria 1-4 are gateway criteria; proposals can only move on to assessment against award criteria if fulfilled upon submission. Criteria 5-6 can be requested to be fulfilled during eligibility check.

	Eligibility criteria	Description
1	The application was submitted on time. If an IT tool is used for the submission of proposals, it should be automatically checked.	The application was submitted by the deadline set in the call for proposals.

2	All sections of the application are correctly filled in. (There is no incorrect information, e.g., "to be added later".) If an IT tool is used for the submission of proposals, it should be automatically checked.	All fields in the application form are mandatory.
3	All project partners are eligible organisations.	To be verified during eligibility check. Programme to decide the rules, e.g., legal status, territorial eligibility etc. Use the EU ARACHNE tool, if applicable.
4	Lead partner remains unchanged from Step 1 to Step 2 (including Lead partner). If an IT tool is used for the submission of proposals, it should be automatically checked.	Lead partner must remain unchanged between the two application phases.
5	Supporting documents to verify eligibility of project partners are attached, where applicable. If an IT tool is used for the submission of proposals, it should be automatically checked.	Not applicable when automatic check is possible (it can be verified based on publicly available data). It should be requested to be submitted during the eligibility check if not fulfilled upon project proposal submission.
6	All required annexes are submitted. If an IT tool is used for the submission of proposals, it should be automatically checked.	It should be requested to be submitted during the eligibility check if not fulfilled upon project proposal submission.

Award criteria

Eligible Step 2 applications will be assessed against the following assessment criteria. Scoring given as an example in the grid below is indicative and should be adapted to national practice. Scoring methodology should be made public and transparent in each call.

	Award criteria and questions	Sections to be checked (optional)	Scoring
	Relevance (min score: 15, max score: 30)		

1.	<p>Project relevance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How well is a need for the project justified? - To what extent will the project contribute to the Programme/ call objectives? - How does the project go beyond the current situation and build on existing practices? 		
2.	<p>Project intervention logic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To what extent are the identified problems, needs and proposed solutions logical and interrelated? - To what extent is the project intervention logic clear and consistent? - To what extent is the project intervention logic plausible? 		
Total scoring of Relevance criteria			
<p>Quality – Project design (min score: 10, max score: 25)</p>			
3.	<p>Methodology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To what extent are the proposed methodology and concept appropriate for the achievement of the project results? - To what extent is the proposed monitoring and evaluation methodology appropriate to the measurement of the project results? 		
4.	<p>Work plan and timetable</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To what extent is the work plan relevant, realistic, consistent, and coherent? Do proposed activities and deliverables lead to planned outputs and results? Are project outputs and results realistic and do they contribute to Programme / call indicators? - To what extent are the proposed project timeframe and timetable realistic and feasible? 		
5.	<p>Budget</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To what extent is the project budget used in accordance with the principles of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o The principle of economy means minimising the costs of resources. The resources used by the project partnership for its activities should be made available in due time, in appropriate quantity and quality, and at the best price. o The principle of efficiency means getting the most from the available resources, the relationship between resources 		

	<p>employed and outputs delivered in terms of quantity, quality, and timing. The need for external expertise is justified and the costs seem realistic.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The principle of effectiveness means meeting the objectives and achieving the intended results. The budget is transparent and proportionate to the proposed work plan, project outputs and results. <p>- Are the applied simplified cost options appropriate and in line with the call rules?</p>		
6.	<p>Communication and dissemination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To what extent are communication and dissemination activities appropriate to reach the relevant target groups and stakeholders? 		
7.	<p>Horizontal principles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does the project make a positive contribution on equal opportunities and non-discrimination? - Does the project make a positive contribution on equality between men and women and gender mainstreaming? - Does the project make a positive contribution on sustainable development? 		
Total scoring of Quality – Project design criteria			
<p>Quality - Project partnership and consortium coordination (min score: 10, max score: 25)</p>			
8.	<p>Partners and cooperation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To what extent is the partnership composition relevant for the proposed project? - To what extent do project partners have proven experience and competence in the thematic field, as well as necessary capacity (organizational, financial) to implement the project? - What added value does cooperation bring? - 		
9.	<p>Partner roles and consortium management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To what extent do the proposed project and risk management methods contribute to the achievement of the project results? - Do all partners play a defined role, which is relevant to the project implementation? 		

	- Is the distribution of tasks appropriate?		
Total scoring of Quality – Project partnership and coordination criteria			
Impact (min score: 8, max score: 20)			
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To what extent will project outputs/results have a long-term impact beyond project lifetime (i.e., on target groups)? - To what extent are project results sustainable? - To what extent are project main outputs replicable/transferable to other organisations/regions? 		
Total scoring of Impact criteria			

The minimum score to be granted is 60 points and minimum scores of subcategories must be attained as well.

Sectoral Application of the Project Evaluation & Selection

The Project Evaluation & Selection topic has been reviewed by experts across the five social service sectors: Families in Poverty and Children in Protection, Work Integration, Persons with Disabilities, Poverty and Homelessness, and Elderly. these sectors. The gathered feedback suggests ongoing improvement to meet sector-specific needs such as:

- **Transparent Evaluation Criteria:** Make sure that evaluation criteria are public and easily accessible by the possible applicants.
- **Alignment of Objectives and Evaluation Criteria:** Make sure that the objectives, priorities, and expected results of the call are the ones focused on in the evaluation grid and its scoring.
- **Coherence with Application Form:** Make sure the Application Form is in line with the evaluation grid, i.e., each evaluation criterion can be matched with the Application Form sections.
- **Specific Scoring Criteria:** Make sure the scoring criteria are smart and specific. The criteria should also provide for sector-specific issues – such as cost efficiency in projects focused on people with disabilities (these costs cannot be simply compared to costs of similar activities in projects with other target groups).
- **Accessible Language in Evaluation Grid:** To facilitate the comprehension of call requirements, make sure that the evaluation grid also uses layman language, just like other parts of the call documentation (glossary should be provided where necessary)
- **Evaluator Involvement in Design:** Make sure that evaluators have tested and assessed the Application Form, the evaluation grid, and its scoring during the design of the call.
- **Clarity in Scoring Guidelines:** Make sure the scoring guidelines provide a clear insight on how to score each of the criteria.
- **Thematic Area Training for Evaluators:** Make sure that evaluators are given training on the thematic area as well, not just the evaluation procedure and methodology.
- **Inclusive Training Sessions:** Make sure that information or training sessions are provided on the evaluation of the proposals and the evaluation criteria, specifically targeting small or less experienced organizations.
- **Clear Communication Throughout:** Ensure clear and foreseeable communication throughout the evaluation process, preferably integrated into the electronic application system.
- **Inclusive Selection Criteria:** Ensure that the selection criteria always cover accessibility and inclusivity of projects (in all types and sectors of calls).