



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL
REGIONAL AND URBAN POLICY

**CALL FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST
FOR MANAGING AUTHORITIES AND INTERMEDIATE BODIES TO
PARTICIPATE IN A PILOT ACTION ON ENGAGING CITIZENS IN THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF COHESION POLICY**

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- (1) Citizen engagement is a priority for cohesion policy 2021-2027 and the start of a new programming period is an opportunity to consider how to enhance and widen citizen engagement in cohesion policy implementation to achieve a competitive, fair and sustainable Europe.
- (2) Citizens and civil society are central to ensure good governance, they have an important role to play in shaping the European Union and its policies. Looking in particular at cohesion policy, engaging with citizens and relevant civil society organisations in decision-making processes brings added value to the implementation of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Cohesion Fund (CF). Managing authorities (MA) and intermediate bodies (IB) of 2021-2027 programmes have a key role to play in this regard as initiators and leaders, but have also a lot to gain from it. Citizen engagement can improve the delivery and quality of investments, e.g. by bringing in thematic knowledge and technical know-how as well as greater transparency, accountability and social inclusion in the implementation process.
- (3) National and regional governments decide on the involvement of stakeholders relevant for programming and management of ERDF and CF in their territory. The “European Code of Conduct on Partnership”¹ supports Member States to organise such cooperation, as partners should be involved throughout the whole programme cycle, from programming and planning of investments to evaluation of results in monitoring committees.
- (4) Despite efforts to engage more actively with citizens, there is a need to do more and to encourage innovative and effective ways of engaging with citizens and civil society organisations - stakeholders who are often not directly involved in the implementation of EU cohesion policy.
- (5) There are influencing factors that can prevent effective involvement of civil society, such as inadequate representation of civil society throughout the programme life cycle, lack of capacity and resources in civil society organisations or public administrations, channels

¹ Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 240/2014 of 7 January 2014 on the European code of conduct on partnership in the framework of the European Structural and Investment Funds

used and type of participation, lack of awareness, management of the process (e.g. availability of feed-back and follow-up mechanisms, timing of consultations).

- (6) Against this background, this call has two main aims: a) supporting MAs and IBs of ERDF and CF operational programmes to strengthen their participatory practices for engaging citizens and civil society organisations, and b) to build good practices for effective use of the ERDF and CF at all levels of implementation through effective processes and/or tools that give people a more direct voice in the second-most important policy area of EU spending.

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE CALL

- (7) Under this Call, the Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy of the European Commission (hereinafter DG REGIO) seeks expressions of interest from MAs and IBs of ERDF and CF programmes wishing to take advantage of expertise support to explore a closer cooperation with citizens and/or civil society organisations in implementation of cohesion policy.
- (8) Work will be carried out in the framework of a pilot action. MAs/IBs participating will receive support on how to best engage citizens in strategic decisions for the implementation of national/regional operational programmes and/or specific policy objectives, e.g. with regard to monitoring of investments and assessing impact or results of cohesion policy investments in their territory.
- (9) DG REGIO will cooperate with and use the expertise of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) for implementing the pilot. The OECD will provide expert assistance and mentoring to the participating MAs/IBs.
- (10) The experiences from the pilot project will be disseminated and will feed into reflections on how to strengthen citizen engagement in the management/implementation of cohesion policy.
- (11) The key outputs of the pilot will be recommendations on how to improve existing practices and/or on the introduction of new initiatives to be taken by the selected MAs/IBs to strengthen citizen engagement in the implementation of cohesion policy and

an action plan on how to roll them out. The action plan will be developed in cooperation with the MA/IB.

- (12) The pilot will start with a kick-off meeting in Brussels. At the meeting the managing authorities will meet the team of OECD experts providing technical support and present their organisational set-up and functioning and their expectations of the pilot.
- (13) The pilot will require active participation of the selected MAs/IBs. They will need to delegate employees to participate in interviews/discussions/meetings/workshops and to contribute to/review documents. Furthermore, Interested MAs/IBs are expected to demonstrate in their expression of interest their commitment and organisational readiness to make necessary resources available to participate in this pilot with the aim of strengthening citizen involvement in the implementation of cohesion policy.
- (14) The expected result of this Call is a shortlist of up to five MAs/IBs of expressions of interest.
- (15) This Call will not result in the award of funding to the authorities expressing their interest in participation in this pilot. The costs associated with the participation of the selected MAs/IBs in this pilot may be covered through technical assistance funding of the concerned operational programme.
- (16) The total duration of the Pilot is expected to be 12 months.

3. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- (17) The recommendations and lessons learnt will be shared with all other potentially interested MAs/IBs who would be interested in implementing similar initiatives, together with the relevant support material.

4. WHO CAN APPLY UNDER THIS CALL? ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- (18) The Call for expression of interest targets MAs/IBs for national or regional operational programmes co-financed by the ERDF and/or the CF. Urban authorities who do not have the status of Intermediate bodies but are involved in the management of programmes co-financed by the ERDF and/or the CF will also be considered eligible

(19) To be eligible, the expression of interest will have to meet all the following eligibility criteria:

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA		REFERENCE IN THE APPLICATION FORM
1.A	The MA/IB has appointed a dedicated interlocutor to work with the European Commission on the pilot project. The MA/IB is strongly motivated to strengthen citizen involvement in the implementation of cohesion policy and is committed to make necessary resources available for this goal. This includes a strong interest in self-assessment/evaluation and openness to peer expertise and working with internal and external stakeholders/expertise.	Section 2
1.B	The managing authority has informed the relevant national coordinating body/ministry (or equivalent) about the application.	Section 3
1.C	The managing authority has pre-identified areas for further citizen involvement in the implementation of cohesion policy.	Sections 4 &5

5. CRITERIA FOR SHORTLISTING EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

(20) The eligible expressions of interest will be assessed against the following **assessment criteria**:

CRITERIA FOR SHORTLISTING EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST		REFERENCE IN THE APPLICATION FORM
2.A	The level of motivation and commitment as demonstrated by the expression of interest.	Section 2
2.B	Description of the main area for strengthening citizen engagement linked to the effective and efficient implementation of cohesion policy at sector, policy or programme level.	Section 4
2.C	Quality of the proposal: The MA/IB is able to motivate its interest to participate to the pilot on the basis of pre-identified areas for further citizen involvement in the implementation of cohesion policy.	Section 2,4,5,6,7
2.D	Sustainability: the MA/IB is committed to ensure implementation of the recommendations designed within the pilot.	Section 5
2.E	Relevance: extent to which the expression of interest is addressing areas for strengthening citizen engagement in cohesion policy.	Section 6

2.F	Dissemination: the MA/IB is willing to disseminate the outcomes and results of the project	Section 7
------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------

6. ASSESSMENT PROCESS

- (21) Expressions of interest will be checked against the eligibility criteria and assessed according to the selection criteria of this Call.
- (22) The Commission aims at a diverse shortlist in terms of Member State coverage and types of projects.
- (23) The assessment will be carried out by a selection panel consisting of representatives of the European Commission. The final decision on the shortlist will be taken by the European Commission.
- (24) All applicants will be informed about the decision taken.
- (25) At this stage of the Call, the shortlisting of an expression of interest does not constitute a binding commitment – either implicit or explicit – on the part of the European Commission to provide support to a managing authority or intermediate body.

7. PROCEDURE FOR SUBMISSION OF EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

- (26) Managing authorities and intermediate bodies expressing their interest to participate in this pilot should complete the application form provided in Annex 1 of this Call.
- (27) The application form is to be completed in English, French or German.
- (28) The expression of interest should be submitted electronically to the following email address: REGIO-E1-ADMINISTRATIVE-CAPACITY@ec.europa.eu

8. DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION OF EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

- (29) The deadline for submitting an expression of interest is **March 31 2020**.
- (30) Expressions of interest submitted after the deadline of this Call will not be considered.

9. CONTACT

In case of any questions, please contact REGIO-E1-ADMINISTRATIVE-CAPACITY@ec.europa.eu