



**INTERREG IVA Programme
Project Assessment & Approval Process -
Clarifications of SEUPB procedures**

Introduction

This paper clarifies a number of points in relation to the application, assessment and approval processes of the INTERREG IVA programme.

This document does not change the assessment and approval process, however it is intended that amendments will provide a more efficient approach for both applicants and the Joint Technical Secretariat (JTS). This should provide a clearer overview of forthcoming workload for the JTS, as well as providing clear, concise and detailed information to applicants on timescales of calls and Steering Committee meetings, new support mechanisms to assist with the application process and guidelines on the level of detail required for applicants to receive funding.

Summary of Key Points

1. A schedule for opening and closing dates for all calls and for Steering Committee meetings has been devised for the next 12 months to provide clear information to applicants.
2. A programme of development support has been put in place to assist applicants.
3. Further Multi Annual plan applications from the Cross Border Groups will be received in coordination with wider calls to the programme in order to improve the efficiency of processing applications.
4. An improved admissibility check will provide timely feed back to applicants on their applications.

Forthcoming Calls

A timetable of forthcoming calls over the next 12 months can be found in Annex 3. A number of open calls are anticipated over the coming months (creative industries / enterprise / collaboration / tourism). In addition, a closed call for networking will be held for the Cross Border Groups.

Further Multi Annual plan applications from the Cross Border Groups will be received in coordination with wider calls to the programme in order to improve the efficiency of processing applications.

Project Assessment and Approval Process

The assessment and approval process applied to projects seeking INTERREG funding is in line with normal standards required for all public expenditure projects. In Northern Ireland projects must meet standards set out in the *Northern Ireland Guide to Expenditure Appraisal and Evaluation (NIGEAE)*. SEUPB has agreed a number of steps in the project approval process with the Member States and Accountable Departments 'INTERREG IVA Detailed Description of Process' document of September 2009 (See Annex 1).

Stage 1

Prior to Stage 1 it is important for applicants to have sufficient information in order to make good quality applications to the programme. Therefore, SEUPB has issued a timetable of forthcoming calls and a programme of development support. (See Annex 3).

- **Project Development Support** – Developmental support will continue to be offered to applicants through individual meetings with JTS staff. Other additional support, through project development workshops and project surgeries will be available and advice provided at these meetings will be impartial from the JTS and is in no way binding on the final outcome of an application.
 - **Project Development Workshops** - These workshops will be held before a call opens and will be used to explain the nature of the upcoming call, the

application process, the detail required in order to complete successful applications, the budgetary requirements and outline common issues that should be addressed in any application.

- **Project Surgeries** – Individual project surgery meetings will be offered towards the end of the call period and will be specifically for applicants who are in the final stages of drafting their applications.
- **Call for applications** - A timetable for calls for proposals which includes proposed dates for Steering Committee meetings will ensure that applicants are aware of the length of the process and when they should expect to receive a decision. Calls are staggered accordingly to provide both applicants time to prepare and JTS sufficient time to assess and process quality applications. On average, the timescale from the close of a call to approval by steering committee is 28 weeks.
- **Application forms submitted to JTS** – The correct application form must be fully completed and submitted in electronic form or by hard copy by the deadline of the call. If the hard copy does not arrive by the deadline, then it should be postmarked before the deadline. The application form covers all main areas of a standard business plan as outlined in Stage 1, 1.2 of Annex 1. Applicants are required to append additional information on the financial data to support all assumptions. ***Once an application has been submitted to JTS, the applicant should have no further contact with the JTS on that specific application and no further information will be accepted on that application.***
- **Admissibility Check** – When applications are received a robust admissibility check will be undertaken to ensure that applications contain all of the relevant information to allow for the assessment process to be undertaken in an effective manner. This information provides a framework for applicants to understand the level of detail required for an application to move to the next stage of the assessment process.

The admissibility check will be completed within 2 weeks of the closing date for applications and will address the following questions:

- a) Was the application form submitted on time?
- b) Has both Part A and Part B applications been completed?
- c) Is the application form fully complete?
- d) Is the project activity within the eligible area?

- e) Is the project activity eligible as identified by the ERDF Regulation 1080/2006 and in line with the INTERREG IVA Operational Programme?
- f) Is the Lead Partner a public body and does it meet the criteria of Lead Partner as set out in Article 20 of Regulation 1080/2006?
- g) Does the application include partner cost budgets?
- h) Does the partnership meet the minimum requirements for cross border working and is the role of each partner outlined to ensure a true cross border partnership project?
- i) Does the application provide evidence of co-operation in at least two of the following four areas – joint development, joint implementation, joint staffing and joint financing
- j) If applicable, is match funding in place?
- k) Is there sufficient information included in the budget to allow for a value for money assessment to be carried out? (i.e. if estimates are provided without supporting evidence, it is not possible to carry out a VfM assessment). Supporting rationale and benchmarked figures should be provided.
- l) If a capital build project, does the project follow the Checklist for Large Scale Capital Projects?

If the application is deemed admissible, the application moves to Stage 2 of the process.

If the JTS determines that the application is inadmissible the project applicant will be informed and will have the opportunity to re-apply when / if the call re-opens. The Steering Committee will be informed of the JTS decision.

Stage 2

- **Outline Business Case (OBC)** – Based on the information provided in the Application Form, JTS prepares an OBC for each application. The OBC is intended to provide Accountable Departments with a first view on the proposal as presented and considered comments on potential strengths or concerns. **Timescale involved: 2 – 4 weeks.**
- **Accountable Departments View on OBC** – Accountable Departments provide a first view on the potential strengths or otherwise of the proposal. **Timescale involved: 2 – 4 weeks**
- **Assessment Report** – JTS will consider the views of the Accountable Department in the preparation of an assessment report. This report scores the proposal against the programme criteria. Projects scoring less than 58% will be presented to the Steering Committee with a recommendation for rejection. Projects scoring above 58% will be subjected to a full economic appraisal if the total value of the project exceeds £500,000, or

a value for money assessment if it is less than £500,000. The Assessment Report need to draw out the issues which should be addressed in an Economic Appraisal. **Timescale involved: 2 – 4 weeks.**

- **Applications Recommended for Rejection by JTS** – Applications that have been rejected by the Steering Committee may be challenged by the applicant through agreed review procedures.
- **In summary, Stage 2 of the application process can take a minimum of 6 weeks and a maximum of 12 weeks.**

Stage 3

- **Applications Recommended for Funding of <£500,000** – A robust Value for Money assessment is conducted in line with the 10 steps of appraisal contained in Section 2 of the Northern Ireland Guide to Expenditure Appraisal and Evaluation (NIGEAE). The results of this assessment will be presented to the Accountable Departments with a covering memo highlighting: Strategic Fit, Options, Value for Money, Affordability, and Achievability. Subject to a positive outcome, applications will be submitted to the Steering Committee with a recommendation for approval.
- **Full Business Case (FBC)** – Applications that have been given an indicative score of > 58% by JTS and seek funding in excess of £500,000 progress to the preparation of a Full Business Case. This includes: completed application form, JTS scored assessment report, Independent Economic Appraisal, Business plan if commercially orientated, and pre-contract checks.
- **Economic Appraisal** – The EA process involves JTS drawing up Terms of Reference which are approved by internal JTS Economist and issued to call off list of approved consultants. When appointed the consultant may wish to liaise with the applicant for further clarification of detailed and specific points. This will be done by the Appraiser and not by the JTS. The assessment report is reconsidered in light of the outcome of the Economic Appraisal and can be re-scored higher or lower. Only those applications scoring over 65 at this stage will be recommended for approval. ***If the Economic Appraisal deems that the project is not VfM, then the project can be recommended for rejection at this stage.***
- **Full Business Case Quality Assured by JTS** – JTS liaises with consultants undertaking the Economic Appraisal to ensure there is adequate consultation with stakeholders. The

allocated Case Officer in JTS will in turn liaise with the JTS Business Case Scrutiny Group (JTS Director, Programme Manager, JTS Economist and JTS Financial Controller). Once the quality of the FBC is deemed to be of a suitable standard by the group, it will be forwarded to Accountable Department for consideration. **Timescale involved for completion of EA: 6 weeks minimum**

- **Full Business Case Quality Assured by Accountable Departments** – The Accountable Department checks the FBC. Any outstanding issues will be directed to JTS for response.

Stage 4

- **Casework Committee – (For applications to enterprise and tourism calls)** - When the FBC is of sufficient quality, DETI NI will determine whether a casework committee will be required in accordance with their own internal procedures. At this stage SEUPB will address outstanding concerns raised by the Accountable Department. The paper work considered at the Committee will include: Final Economic Appraisal, Pre-contracting Check, Memo from Director of SEUPB JTS.
- **Final Business Case** – Accountable Departments will inform SEUPB when a project has been approved and if any conditions must be applied to departmental funding. **Timescale involved AD: 6 weeks minimum**

Stage 5

- **Final Decision of INTERREG IVA Steering Committee** – Applications are presented to the Steering Committee by JTS and this will be final stage in the decision making chain. The Steering Committee may make additional recommendations for conditions of funding. **Timescale involved for notification of Steering Committee meeting: 2 weeks**
- The applicant can request a review via the agreed review procedures.

Stage 6

- If project approved by Steering Committee, a Letter of Offer is issued. **Timescale involved: 4 weeks.**

Summary of Timescales for Project Assessment and Approval

Stages of Process	Activity	Timescales
Stage 1	Admissibility Check	2 weeks
Stage 2	OBC	2 – 4 weeks
	AD OBC	2 – 4 weeks
	Assessment Report	2 – 4 weeks
Stage 3	Economic Appraisal	6 weeks
Stage 4	Full Bus Case to ADs	6 weeks
Stage 5	Steering Committee	2 weeks
		<u>28 weeks</u>
Stage 6	Issue LoO	4 weeks
TOTAL		<u>32 weeks</u>

Annex 3 - Timetable of Calls, Project Development Support and Steering Committee Dates

Theme	Call Open and Close Dates	Project Development Support	Steering Committee dates
Creative Industries Call	24 June – 6 August 2010	Individual meetings with interested organisations (ongoing during July 2010)	March 2011
		Project Surgery, 2 August 2010	
Collaboration Call (for CBGs Admin Costs only)	Revised Submission 27 August 2010	Individual meetings (ongoing during August 2010)	End October 2010
		Project Surgery, 17 August 2010	
Networking Call	20th Sept – 24th Sept 2010 Closed call	Individual meetings with potential project applicants (ongoing during July / Aug 2010) - carried out by Intertradelreland	June 2011
		Project Development workshop, 3 September 2010	
		Project Surgery, 14 September 2010	
Enterprise Call	9 Nov – 7 Jan 2011 (Provisional)	Individual meetings with potential project applicants (ongoing Oct/ Nov/ Dec 2010)	August 2011
		Project development workshop, 3 November 2010	
		Project Surgery, 17 December 2010	
Tourism Call	24 Jan – 25 March 2011 (Provisional)	Individual meetings with potential project applicants (ongoing during Nov / Dec 2010)	Oct 2011
		Project Development workshop, 13 January 2011	
		Project Surgery, 15 March 2011	
Collaboration Call	4 April – 13 May 2011 (Provisional)	Individual meetings with potential project applicants (ongoing during Feb / March 2011)	December 2011
		Project Development workshop, 29 March 2011	
		Project Surgery, 3 May 2011	