

## **FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions)**

*2021-2022 Biodiversa+ Joint Call for research projects  
“Supporting the protection of biodiversity and  
ecosystems across land and sea”*

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## 1. Call text (themes, scope, methodological approach)

### 1.1 I have question about the research themes and call themes. Who can I contact?

For reasons of fairness and equity, the Call Secretariat and the funding organisation contact points cannot answer questions related to the research themes of the proposals, i.e. whether these are in adequacy with the call text.

Applicants are strongly advised to take careful note of the aims and scope of the call and to assess the relevance of their proposed research against the thematic priorities as described in the Call Announcement document.

Note that this call is focused on the protection of biodiversity in the wild. This does not, for example, include efforts for restoration of habitats and species, or ex-situ conservation.

### 1.2 There are different themes in the call text: do I have to choose only one? Is there any restrictions?

Applicants are invited to submit proposals addressing one or more of the three themes outlined in the Call Announcement document. Projects combining aspects from several themes are encouraged. In the application form, the applicants will have to declare the % for each theme their proposal corresponds to.

### 1.3 Is the call oriented towards more basic research or applied research? What is the TRL (Technology Readiness Level) expected?

We try to go beyond the linear model of research (basic vs. applied research) and there are no formal requirements in this sense. The call is aimed at funding excellent projects, which include both academic excellence and innovative science on one hand and stakeholder engagement and the demonstration of a clear social and policy impact on the other hand. Transdisciplinary approach is also encouraged.

### 1.4 What is meant by Stakeholder engagement?

While projects will have to be academically excellent, they should also explicitly engage stakeholders (e.g. managers and users in the field, businesses, policy actors, local administrations, citizens...) in order to maximise the impact of their research. This may include co-design of projects with stakeholders, analysing stakeholders' needs

and preferences and other relevant societal (e.g. governance) aspects through social/economic science approaches as well as developing practical management tools, guidelines, knowledge bases, etc. to be directly used by or in relation with stakeholders.

To this end, it is highly recommended that applicants use the BiodivERsA Stakeholder Engagement Handbook as guidance when developing their proposal. This guide is available online (<https://www.biodiversa.org/702>).

In the proposal, applicants should detail how stakeholders will be engaged in the project: who may benefit from or make use of the research, how they might benefit from and/or make use of the research, and methods for engaging with stakeholders and exchanging / disseminating data/knowledge/skills in the most effective and appropriate manners

### **1.5 What is meant by Policy relevance?**

Project proposals, in addition to being academically excellent, are expected to be relevant for management and/or policy. BiodivERsA developed a guide for policy relevance of research projects to help researchers understand what is meant by policy and societal relevance and how this is evaluated in proposals. This guide is available online (<http://www.biodiversa.org/1543>). We recommend you to use it when designing your project and preparing your proposal.

While applicants are seeking to present policy relevant research and engage in science-policy interfacing in their proposals, they should make sure to include the four S.I.E.V. elements, as described in the guide: Statement (on the policy relevance of the proposed research), Identification (of relevant policies and stakeholders), Engagement (activities are planned and presented in the proposal) and Value (added by the transnational dimension of your proposal for policy-making).

### **1.6 What is the signification of transnational Added Value?**

Transnational added value is the value resulting from the transnational research project, which is additional to the value that would have resulted from research projects funded at national level. The added value may vary, depending on the type of project, and there can be various answers to this question.

However, there should be clear evidence of added value either directly within the countries involved in the research, or indirect value accrued as a result of, e.g. learning from models applied to countries outside of the countries involved.

Transnational added value may include: relevance to international policy statements or processes, legislative framework or management plans; clear added value to national research projects across the world by linking expertise and efforts across national teams and across studied areas and research models; bringing about comparisons at the local level between researchers and stakeholders who are not used to work together; standardization of methods, general increase of common knowledge in biodiversity relative to the themes of the call, etc.

### **1.7 What is meant by transdisciplinarity?**

Though several definitions of transdisciplinarity coexist, the definition used here is the involvement of stakeholders at the different stages of the project where relevant, for instance to define research objectives and strategies, facilitate inputs from non-academic stakeholders, better incorporate the diffusion of learning produced by the research and facilitate a systemic way of addressing a challenge.

This will thus be evaluated by policy/management experts, part of the assessment criteria “Impact”.

### **1.8 What do you mean by “the research funded will need to go beyond single study cases”?**

It is expected for the results of the projects to be generalised beyond a very limited number of specific sites. For example, if a project only focuses on 2 sites of 3 ha each in Portugal, it will be difficult to generalise and demonstrate how the results and knowledge generated can have a wider implication (network or transect of sites, modelling, or any other relevant approach) in line with the spirit of a transnational initiative.

### **1.9 Does the focus of the research action have to be on the European ground? Does it go against the spirit of the call if the research target considers countries not eligible in the call?**

The research is not geographically limited. In any case, the scope or scale of the proposed research should exceed a single country and the transnational (including European) added value should be clearly demonstrated.

### **1.10 Can the focus of research be on an ecosystem of one country in which researchers from different countries are interested?**

The researchers from different countries may work on sites in a given country; but if the results are mostly relevant for one country only and hardly generalizable, the transnational added value might be insufficient.

### 1.11 Could you give example titles of projects you would fund?

The Call Secretariat does not comment on the scientific content of individual proposals or on their eligibility. This task will be performed by an independent panel of experts. For the same reason we cannot provide examples of projects to be funded. Nevertheless, the applicants are encouraged to check the projects previously funded by BiodivERsA.

## 2. Eligibility (common eligibility criteria and funding organisations' regional/national rules)

### 2.1 Who can apply?

The call is open for any eligible research organisations. National/regional eligibility criteria apply to research organisations and for private sector organisations (profit and non-profit).

The main applicant (project coordinator) must be employed by an eligible organisation in one of the countries participating in the call.

We draw your attention on the fact that **compliance with funding organisations' eligibility criteria and rules (e.g. eligible budget items) is mandatory**; applicants are strongly advised to approach their respective Funding organisation Contact Point to make sure they respect all the eligibility criteria and rules

Only eligible pre-proposals and eligible full-proposals will be evaluated.

- The Funding organisations' rules will soon be available on the BiodivERsA website.

Instructions regarding eligibility, submission, evaluation criteria and other relevant information are also published in the official Call Announcement text.

### 2.2 Which countries/regions can participate to the Biodiversa+ joint call?

The Biodiversa+ joint call is open to Partners from the countries/regions with a Funding Organisation participating to the call.

To access the most updated list of participating Funding Organisation, please consult the following webpage: <https://www.biodiversa.org/1772>.

Each funding organisation participating to the call will fund its national/regional research groups.

## 2.2 What is the difference between the general eligibility call rules and the funding organisations' rules?

For the projects to be considered eligible for funding, they need to comply with a set of general eligibility rules of the call (see call criteria in the Call Announcement document). In addition, each project partner must be eligible according to the rules and criteria of their funding organisation.

**IMPORTANT:** if one partner in the consortium is declared ineligible by their funding organisation, this may lead to the ineligibility of the whole proposal, if they consequently fail to comply with the general rules (such as a minimum of 3 eligible partners in the consortium).

## 2.3 My country is not participating in the Call. Can I apply?

Partners from any country can be associated in the project, as self-financed Partners if they can bring a secured budget from their own source of funding.

They should upload a signed official letter of commitment from their Head of Department or Financial administrator (as appropriate) on the [EPSS](#) (.pdf) when submitting their full proposals. The letter of commitment should be maximum 1 page for each self-financed partner and should be written in English. It is the responsibility of the coordinator to compile the letters of all self-financed partners. The letters of commitment are only requested for self-financed partners. Any other letters of support WILL NOT be considered for the evaluation.

Alternatively, non-eligible partners may be sub-contracted by eligible partners if their funding organisation rules permit it.

Further information is available in the [call documents](#).

However, please note that:

- The project coordinator must be employed by an eligible organisation according to the terms and conditions of the participating Funding

Organisation from which he/she applies for support. If a Partner is not eligible, the whole proposal will be considered ineligible and will not be evaluated, unless the eligibility issue(s) can be fixed.

- Partners from countries not participating in the call are not counted in the minimum number of 3 different European or associated countries needed in a project to be eligible.

I am affiliated to different laboratories in different countries. Can I apply several times as Partner within one Project under my different affiliations?

It is not forbidden to have a same researcher acting as researcher in charge for several Partners within one Project (except if otherwise defined by a Funding Organisation's specific rules).

Yet please note that in this case:

- This Partner cannot request funding from several funding organisations. He/She will thus have to choose one Funding Organisation to which funding is requested, and
- This Partner will not be counted as two different Partners for the eligibility check.

#### **2.4 Are international organisations such as IUCN eligible to receive funds and to be part of a consortium?**

One of the main eligibility principles is the eligibility of the applicants to one of the funding organisations in the countries participating in the call.

In case of IUCN (and other international organisations) it depends on the eligibility of the institution versus its location and the national funding rules of the corresponding funding organisation. If a delegation of IUCN is eligible for funding in their country, then they are eligible in the call. If not, they may join the consortium as a self-financed partner or via subcontracting through an eligible partner.

If it is eligible, it will count as a national partner towards the minimum number of eligible partners. If the institution is participating to the project on their own funds, it will not count in the minimum number of partners required.

#### **2.5 How long should the project last?**

The project duration is **3 years**.

### 3. Call process (call calendar, evaluation procedure and criteria)

How will my project be evaluated and according to which criteria?

A two-step evaluation process will be organised:

- (i) **The first step** will consist in an **eligibility check** and an **evaluation (peer-review) of pre-proposals** by the Evaluation Committee (EvC) against the following criteria: fit to the scope of the call, novelty of the research and impact.

The Call Steering Committee (CSC, i.e. all funding organisations) will decide on the number of projects to be invited to step 2, following the evaluation made by the EvC. Only successful pre-proposals will be invited to submit full proposals.

- (ii) **The second step** will consist in an **eligibility check** and an **evaluation of full proposals by the EvC and external reviewers**. The EvC will convene to evaluate and make the final ranking of the submitted full proposals according to the following assessment criteria: (scientific) excellence, quality and efficiency of the implementation and impact; and considering the reviews obtained from external reviewers.

The CSC will decide on which projects to recommend for funding, strictly adhering to the order of the ranking list established by the EvC.

For more detailed information about the evaluation criteria, please consult the [call documents](#) (part on “Assessment criteria”).

### 4. Proposal submission platform

#### 4.1 How do I apply for the call?

- (i) First, applicants have to submit **pre-proposals** (in English): they have to provide information about the project consortia, a 5-pages description of the project, and the required budget for each partner through the [Electronic Proposal Submission System \(EPSS\)](#) before **the 30th of November 2021 – 15:00 CET (Local time in Brussels)**.

**Submission of pre-proposals is MANDATORY**; it is not possible to enter the procedure at a later stage.

- (ii) Then, applicants invited to step 2 will have to submit their **full proposal** (in English) through the EPSS before **the 14th of April 2022 – 15:00 CEST (Local time in Brussels)**.

Please note that it is an **ONLINE SUBMISSION**. [The Electronic Proposal Submission System \(EPSS\)](#) will be open to the applicants at least one month before each deadline. **The online form is the only format that will be accepted. NO application can be sent by email.**

#### 4.2 In which language(s) can the pre-proposals and full-proposals be written?

Proposals must be written in **English** only. Proposal written in any other language won't be evaluated.

#### 4.3 Which document should be submitted for pre-proposal and full proposal?

Pre-proposals and full proposals have to be submitted via the [“Electronic Proposal Submission System” \(EPSS\)](#).

- You can download a [PDF](#) or [word](#) file of the pre-proposal and [PDF](#) or [word](#) file of the full proposal application forms on the BiodivERsA website, for information purposes only. Please note that their format might be slightly modified to fit the online EPSS, and that only proposals submitted through the EPSS will be considered for evaluation.

*In the EPSS:* for both pre-proposals and full proposals, please note that only one .PDF file can be uploaded. If you upload more than one file, the first file uploaded will be erased and will not be evaluated. Other file's types than .PDF are not accepted.

**Letters of support are not requested** and won't be considered for the evaluation (except for self-financed partner who have to provide evidence that their organisations will support their activities - see question “My country is not participating in the Call. Can I apply?”).

#### 4.4 What are PIC and NACE codes (requested in the application forms)?

A PIC (Participation identification code) is a 9-digit number serving as a unique identifier for organisations (legal entities) participating in EU funding programmes / procurements. A search tool for organisations and their PICs is available [here](#).

The NACE code is a Statistical Classification of Economic Activities of the organisation. You can find further information about NACE at [Eurostat website](#) and the classification can be downloaded [here](#).

#### 4.5 Can I write my pre-proposal/proposal on several occasions on the submission platform?

If the deadline for submission has not been reached yet, you can write your pre-proposal/full proposal on several occasions by saving your progress each time. Do not forget to save your progress. If you've finished to write your pre-proposal/full proposal, please do not forget to click on the 'Submit' button. Otherwise, any pre-proposal/full proposal will be registered as it was at the closing of the submission platform.

## 5. Building a consortium

### 5.1 Are partners allowed to change between pre-proposal and full proposal stage?

The information given in the pre-proposals is binding. No changes regarding the proposals' content will be allowed by the Call Steering Committee (CSC) between the pre-proposals and full proposals. However, **it is still possible to make minor changes to improve your proposal if the objectives remain unchanged (you will have to declare these changes in your full proposal).**

Regarding the administrative details, a **limited number of changes may be allowed by the Funding Organisation Contact Point (FCP) and/or CSC, provided they are in line with the general rules of the call and the rules of the Funding Organisations:**

**Minor change of budget can be allowed by the relevant Funding Organisation.** The FCP can decide according to its own rules whether it needs a justification for it. There is no need to inform the Call Secretariat.

#### **Changes in the consortium composition:**

**No changes of coordinator (person in charge) will be allowed**, except in case of force majeure. A request of change of coordinator must be submitted to the Call Secretariat, at least one week before the deadline for submitting full proposals and it will be discussed on a case-by-case basis by the CSC.

**Changes in the consortium composition are allowed (maximum two changes of Partners), provided approval by the concerned Funding Organisations.** Please note that the following actions are considered as changes: **addition, removal or replacement of a Partner (incl. subcontracted and self-financed partners).** Please note that the maximum number of changes applies to "Partner"; it does not apply to "team member".

- o All new Partners have to comply with their respective Funding Organisation's rules. If a new Partner is declared ineligible at step 2, the whole consortium will be declared ineligible and won't be evaluated.
- o In case of a removal of a Partner, consortia have to make sure that their consortium still includes the minimum number of requested Partners. If this is not the case, the project will be declared ineligible and won't be evaluated.

**In terms of procedure:** The eligibility of new research Partners must be confirmed at least one week before the full proposal submission deadline. Changes must be asked to the FCP, with the Call Secretariat in copy, who needs to check the eligibility of the new Partner and agree with the change, before being implemented into the EPSS.

**Please note that the following cases are not considered as one of the maximum two changes but the procedure mentioned above remains the same:**

If the change is explicitly requested by a Funding Organisation after the eligibility decision at step 1

If a researcher in charge (person) remains the same but changes the institutions (within the same country), provided the institution fulfils eligibility criteria of the same funding organisation.

Similarly, if the institution remains the same but the researcher in charge (person) changes, provided the researcher in charge fulfils eligibility criteria of the same funding organisation.

**The change(s) should not change the substance of the proposal.** Applicants will have to indicate in their full proposal the changes made as compared to the pre-proposals (for information for the EvC and the Call Secretariat).

Compliance with Funding Organisation eligibility criteria and rules (e.g. eligible budget items) is mandatory; it is thus strongly recommended that applicants approach their respective Funding Organisation Contact Point to make sure they respect all the eligibility criteria and rules (contact list and main Funding Organisations' rules are available in the [call documents](#) published on the BiodivERsA website). **If one Partner is not eligible, the whole proposal will be considered ineligible and will not be evaluated, unless the eligibility issue(s) can be fixed.**

## **5.2 Is the budget allowed to be changed between pre-proposal and full proposal stage?**

**Minor change of budget can be allowed by the relevant Funding Organisation.** The FCP can decide according to its own rules whether it needs a justification for it. There is no need to inform the Call Secretariat.

### **5.3 Can a researcher participate in several proposals submitted?**

Apart from the position of coordinator, there are no rules at the level of the Call regarding the number of proposals in which a partner can be included. The project coordinator (person in charge) can only participate as coordinator in one proposal of this call.

However, we draw your attention on the fact that some Funding Organisations have specific rules for this aspect. Please make sure that each national/regional team follows its relevant Funding Organisation rules. Specific questions should be addressed to the Funding organisation Contact Points.

### **5.4 What is meant by declaration of parallel submission of proposal?**

Applicants have to provide details of any other proposal related to the one they are submitting in the present call, in case it has been submitted to other funding opportunities.

Duplication of funding is not allowed for the same (whole or part) research project.

### **5.5 Is it necessary to provide a Consortium Agreement with the full-proposal?**

According to the Biodiversa+ 2021-2022 common rules, no Consortium Agreement must be submitted with the full-proposal form. However, please note that after the evaluation process and project selection, some national funding organisations require from the project partners selected for funding to establish a project consortium agreement. The requirement will thus apply to all the project partners, even if their respective funding organisation does not require a project consortium agreement. In this case, the consortium agreement will be mandatory to launch the administrative registration of the project before the beginning of the project.

### **5.6 I am looking for a Partner for my project or a project to join. What should I do?**

Biodiversa+ has developed a Partner Search Tool that allows you to look for a Partner for a Project you would like to submit; or look for a Project to join.

You simply have to fill in a Partner / Project Search form on the following platform:  
<https://proposals.etag.ee/biodiversa/2021/partner-search>

Your form will then be visible on the platform and you may be contacted. You have the possibility to search for partners or projects to join on the platform according to different criteria: country, discipline, keywords.

### **5.7 What is the minimum size of the Consortium?**

The project must be a transnational project involving eligible research Partners from at least three different countries participating in the call and requesting support from at least three different Funding Organisations. In addition, part of the eligible Partners, at least two must be from different EU Member States or [Associated Countries](#) participating in the call.

### **5.8 Should the project coordinator be a permanent staff?**

According to the call's common rules, there are no rules regarding the duration of contract for each project team members. Members of the Evaluation Committee (EvC) will evaluate proposals following the criteria defined in the Call text. Thus, projects should not be disqualified by the EvC because of the work contract.

However, make sure your project stays in line with the common rules regarding the consortium's size/composition and, as some national Funding Organisations have specific restrictions about work contract/position, partners should also refer to the national/regional Funding Organisations' rules implied in the project to make sure they're in line with all the national/regional Funding Organisations' rules. The Partners will be ineligible if they do not follow their national/regional rules.

### **5.9 What are the key requirements for a consortium coordinator? Are all career stages, including early career researchers, welcome to coordinate? Is a PhD a requirement? Is the experience of the coordinator included in the evaluation criteria?**

The call on a general level does not specify any restrictions with regard to the coordinator's experience or profile. There are two formal requirements for a coordinator: they need to be employed by an eligible institution and cannot change between Step 1 and 2. The rest is in the domain of [the funding organisations and their eligibility rules](#) – different countries may have different conditions and require a certain level of experience/profile for the coordinator.

Nevertheless, this is a highly competitive call and the competence and expertise of the consortium, including the leadership skills, will be assessed by the independent panel of experts.

### **5.10 What should be the size of a project (in terms of partners and resources)? Is there a maximum budget per project?**

Apart from the obligation to form consortia of teams from a sufficient number of countries participating to the call, there are no pre-requisites regarding the size of the projects.

However, keep in mind that a transnational programme such as Biodiversa+ aims at supporting **medium size research projects** (average for Biodiversa+ funded project: 5 different countries per project) though this remains flexible.

There are no rules regarding a minimum or maximum budget per project at the level of the Call. Projects will be evaluated on their general coherence, and on the adequacy of the funding requested compared to the scientific objectives and activities planned. However, funding requirements for a given project should be reasonable as compared to total amount of funding planned for a given funding organisation.

However, please note that some Funding Organisations have defined **minimum and/or maximum amount per partners or per project in their Funding Organisations' rules**. Please make sure to follow these rules. Specific questions should be addressed to the Funding organisation Contact Points.

In case of a too high financial pressure on a participating country due to the high number of teams from this country in the submitted applications, the applicants may be asked to proceed budget cuts.

## **6. Open data**

### **6.1 What is meant by Data Sharing policy?**

Applicants are required to produce and implement an open access data management plan to enable the sharing of research data. Preliminary data management plans are part of the full proposals and are included in the evaluation as part of the criteria on quality/efficiency of the implementation.

A data management workshop will be organized at the beginning of the funded projects (back-to-back the kick-off meeting) to exchange best practices related to data

management, present hands-on advices, and work with the funded projects on how they can improve their data management plans (DMPs) and practices related to open data.

At least the coordinator of each funded projects is expected to participate to this workshop and should plan resources to attend. It is recommended to also plan resources to allow the data manager of the project (if different from the coordinator) to attend this workshop.

BiodivERsA has developed a guide on data management, open data and the production of data management plan. This guide is available [here](#).

## **7. Contacts and access to information**

### **7.1 Who can I contact if I have further question?**

First and foremost, please read entirely the [call documents](#) on the Biodiversa website. Please also consult your Funding organisations' rules and, if needed, contact your Funding organisation Contact Points (FCPs).

**For specific questions related to the budget, criteria and rules of your funding organisation**, please consult your FCPs. You will find their contact detail(s) in the Funding Organisations Rules document soon available on the BiodivERsA website.

**For general information on the call**, please contact the Call Secretariat: [biodiversa.cs@agencerecherche.fr](mailto:biodiversa.cs@agencerecherche.fr) (Juliette Bettus and Sophie Germann)

**For technical questions regarding the EPSS**, please contact the EPSS technical helpdesk:

Taavi Tiirik: [epss.biodiversa@g.etag.ee](mailto:epss.biodiversa@g.etag.ee)

**For GDPR questions**, please contact your FCP and [biodiversa@fondationbiodiversite.fr](mailto:biodiversa@fondationbiodiversite.fr). Please note that you can also consult the [EPSS General Data Policy](#) and the [BiodivERsA Privacy and Data Policy](#).