

# TEAMING FOR EXCELLENCE 2025

## 31 FAQs (August 2024)

- ❖ [If the coordinator in Teaming stage 1 is a national/regional authority, can it withdraw from the project for Teaming Stage 2 as this might provoke a conflict of interest?](#)

The coordinator cannot change from stage 1 to stage 2. In Horizon Europe, Teaming is being shaped as one call, **but in two stages**. The consortium and especially the coordinator needs to be fixed from the very beginning in stage 1, and all possibilities to provoke a conflict of interest need to be well thought through by the applicant **before submitting the proposal**. This means that if the conflict of interest can potentially arise, in particular for the coordinator, it needs to be eliminated already for the stage-1 proposal.

- ❖ [Is it possible to add or remove partners between Teaming stage 1 and Teaming stage 2 proposals or while the project is running?](#)

Due to the fact that it impacts the quality of the proposals, removing partners from the consortium between stage 1 and stage 2 is, in principle, not possible, except in “force majeure” cases (e.g. bankruptcy or any other reason of ineligibility occurring between the two stages). In such cases, the change should be communicated to the European Commission / Research Executive Agency (REA) as soon as possible. However, the addition of new partners is not forbidden, but must be duly justified in the context of the proposal activities.

While a project is running, in principle, this is possible and would require an amendment of the Grant Agreement. However, due to the special nature of the Teaming action, amendments regarding termination and addition of partners will be analysed in detail and dealt with on a case-by-case basis. Given the nature of the Teaming call, it is strongly advised that the coordinator does not change.

It is worth mentioning that according to the [Annotated Model Grant Agreement](#) (Article 39.1), “The Agreement may be amended, unless the amendment entails changes to the Agreement which would call into question the decision awarding the grant or breach the principle of equal treatment of applicants.

- ❖ [Can a foundation or an SME be eligible to be Coordinator?](#)

The topic description does not specify the type of legal entities that are eligible for funding. Considering the nature of Teaming actions, namely to create new or modernise existing centres of excellence to help Widening countries to increase their R&I intensity and to become more competitive globally, all types of institutions dealing with research and innovation excellence are encouraged to participate as it could provide additional added value to the teaming process. However, to be eligible, the organisation applying as Coordinator has to be a university or a research organisation, a national or regional authority or a research funding agency.

- ❖ [Would the inclusion of an existing Centre of Excellence \(CoE\) under granted Teaming project as associated partner in the application \(i.e. not receiving funding\) be acceptable?](#)

This Teaming action is not designed to support CoE that have already benefitted financially from previous Teaming calls. However, a Teaming CoE participating as an associated partner is initially acceptable as far it supports its process of development or modernisation, while not receiving additional budget or claiming double funding. Its suitability would be assessed during the proposal evaluation phase.

- ❖ [Can the coordinating organisation from the Widening country be either public or private?](#)

According to the Work Programme, the coordinator will be a university or a research organisation, a national or regional authority or a research funding agency, i.e. with a public or private legal status.

❖ **[How should the financial commitment for the complementary funding to the project be demonstrated?](#)**

As specified in the Work Programme, the proposal should include a clear description of the project part supported by complementary funding, where relevant including the eligible category of research and development, technical specifications of infrastructure, preliminary planning for building and installations, cost-benefit analysis, etc.

It should present an investment plan including the letter(s) of commitment for complementary funding from the competent national/regional authorities or private sources to commit financial resources for implementing the future centre, in particular regarding investment in infrastructure and equipment. The letter(s) of commitment for complementary funding of the project will be an integral part of the evaluation of the proposal.

The letter of commitment should contain the following information:

1. The role, if any, of the committing entity during the project,
2. The identity of the committing entity (i.e. national ministry, regional/local authority, funding agency, private sector, European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), Managing Authority, etc.) and the relationship, if any, with recipient entity.
3. The letter of commitment needs to be duly signed.

For specific details on the nature, amounts and timeline of the funding sources and concrete assurances for the long-term availability of funding, please see the [Horizon Europe Work Programme 2023-2025 for Widening](#).

❖ **[Are the costs which can be claimed by the “advanced” partner limited in any way, can the “advanced” partner provide any financial contribution, and what kinds of research costs can be claimed?](#)**

Eligible expenses that can be claimed by the “advanced” partner are identical to those of the partner(s) from the Widening Country in accordance with the [Annotated Model Grant Agreement](#) (art. 6). Regarding possible financial contributions from the “advanced” partner, it is up to the partnership to decide if it is needed and how it would be elaborated in the proposal. As far as such a contribution would reinforce the long-term financial aspect of the partnership, applicants could elaborate on it in the proposal.

Regarding the research costs, the Horizon Europe Work Programme 2023-2025 for Widening specifies that a minor research component can be accepted. The minor research component may include necessary consumables, small equipment and personnel costs for a preparatory research project. Please see the [Work Programme](#) for further details.

❖ **[Is it mandatory to establish the Centre of Excellence as a separate legal entity with a VAT number and what would be the human resources strategy to be adopted?](#)**

It is not mandatory to constitute the Centre of Excellence as a legal entity and the Centre of Excellence does not need to have a VAT number.

Regarding the human resources strategy, the European Commission expects that the Centres of Excellence to be created (or significantly upgraded/modernised) through the Teaming projects will become drivers for change in the Widening countries. That is why it is indispensable that the Centres have the highest degree of autonomy possible in every aspect of decision-making, including recruitment. Therefore, it is crucial – as specified under the Special Conditions – Procedure of the Call Topic – that the Centres ensure that all recruitments follow a transparent, merit-based and open recruitment procedure for all staff, including management positions.

As mentioned in the Work Programme, a robust human resource strategy needs also to address gender equality (in line with the research institutions respective gender equality plans, mandatory for all proposals submitted as of 2022) and international component, ensuring appropriate management capacities for the effective and efficient running of the Centre of Excellence.

❖ **Is there a monitoring process at EU level for the complementary funding from the national/regional public authority?**

Throughout the project's duration, there will be a continuous monitoring process for the timely and accurate delivery of the complementary funding coming from any financial source. This is particularly important to ensure that the project is carried out in accordance with the evaluated workplan in order to achieve the ultimate goal/objective of the project. Complementary funding being an integral part of the proposal, requires that any change related to it is assessed against the impact it may have on the action's overall execution and the expected results.

❖ **What is the ideal ratio of budget allocated to the "advanced" institution(s) compared to the coordinator (and partners) from the Widening Country?**

There is no ideal ratio regarding the allocation of funding between the "advanced" institution(s) and the coordinator (and partners) in the Widening country. Nevertheless, the main reasoning for the budget needs to correspond to the objectives of Teaming that are mainly focused on the partner(s) in the Widening country, especially in advancing the region/country where the Centre of Excellence is/will be established or is/will be upgraded/modernised.

❖ **Is a consortium agreement between the beneficiaries required?**

Yes, signing a consortium agreement between all the beneficiaries in the project (i.e. all entities that sign the grant agreement) is required (following standard Horizon Europe rules), as provided for in [Annotated Model Grant Agreement](#), art.7. Any other additional internal agreements/arrangements are voluntary and up to the participants themselves.

❖ **What does the term 'competitive salaries' mean? How should the applicant approach this condition?**

The actual financial expression of a salary and both level and element of competitiveness are up to the applicant to decide. The European Commission cannot prescribe any values here, since levels of competitiveness vary very much in different countries. However, it is advisable to respect the national legislation.

With the term 'competitive salaries' the European Commission intends to underline that applicants, while looking for the best quality personnel to be employed in the Centre of Excellence, needs to give an appropriate attention to the salaries paid for their future employees. In this context, 'competitive' means that the salary needs to have a certain competitive advantage compared to a chosen bar, which can be an average salary in that country, or a particular value for a certain position or scientific domain or grade.

❖ **It can be more difficult for smaller countries to get complementary funding to cover infrastructure costs from other sources. Is this taken into account?**

The source for the complementary funding can be very diverse (e.g. national and/or regional funding, European funding, such as from Cohesion policy programmes, or private sources), with no obligation for any particular source to be used. A combination of several of them can be contributing to the requested amount. It is very clearly acknowledged that the 'one size fits all' principle cannot be applied, but the country size does not matter.

As specified in the Work Programme, the total amount of the complementary funding must be at least equal to the total requested Horizon Europe contribution. This feature is very specific to Teaming calls; therefore, Teaming is called a synergy grant.

❖ [What kind of costs can be covered from complementary funding? Can in-kind contributions or own funding be considered as complementary funding?](#)

Infrastructure costs as well as the majority of equipment costs and consumables **cannot be funded from a Horizon Europe grant**. Therefore, a considerable amount for these costs needs to come from other sources.

A clear description of the project part supported by a complementary funding must be included in the proposal, where relevant including the eligible category of research and development, technical specifications of infrastructure, preliminary planning for building and installations, cost-benefit analysis, etc.

Whatever the funding source, the principle of avoiding **double funding** applies as stated in the [General Annexes](#) to the Work Programme (Annex G) and as specified in article 130 of the [Financial Regulation 966/2012](#), meaning that cost items reimbursed from other sources shall be different from cost items supported under Horizon Europe.

In-kind contributions or own funding cannot be considered as complementary funding.

❖ [Are any costs ineligible? What is the reimbursement rate? Can an applicant request an EU contribution from Horizon Europe below €15 million?](#)

Infrastructure costs **are not eligible under the Horizon Europe grant** and are expected to be supported by other types of funding, if applicable. An example of an infrastructural costs could be the rent for the premises in which the Centre of Excellence is/will be installed.

The general reimbursement rates (standard Coordination and Support Action: 100%/25%) and the rules for legal and financial set-up of the Grant Agreements are described in the [General Annexes](#) to the Work Programme (Annex G). For further details on the costs expected to be covered (e.g. start-up & implementation, recruitment, etc.) by the EU grant, see the [Horizon Europe Work Programme 2023-2025 for Widening](#).

It is possible for an applicant to request less than €15 million as stated in the Work Programme.

❖ [Is alignment with the national/regional Research and Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialisation Strategy \(RIS3\) required? How will this be evaluated?](#)

As specified in the Work Programme, coordinating applicants in the Widening country must demonstrate how the proposed project is relevant to the Smart Specialisation Strategy of the country or the region in which it is/will be established (or upgraded/modernised). It is important not only when Cohesion policy funding is mobilised with respect to enabling conditions on governance of smart specialisation introduced under cohesion policy programmes, but also in more general terms: 'The implementation of Teaming action is expected to become an influential and meaningful bridge particularly between smart specialisation strategies and excellence in R&I with the aim of strengthening the European Research Area and contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals.'

In case of Associated countries or Outermost regions, the notion of the Smart Specialisation Strategy can be replaced by an equivalent national or regional R&I strategy.

This aspect will be evaluated as a sub-criterion under the Excellence criterion.

❖ [Can the budget requested from Horizon Europe be increased in the second stage?](#)

The budget request cannot change from stage 1 to stage 2. Both stages refer to the same proposal that needs to be thought through even if not yet fully presented in the stage 1 already.

❖ [What are the benefits for the leading institutions in participating in Teaming projects?](#)

A non-exhaustive list includes access to:

1. world-class research infrastructures (most often) that are frequently to be found in the Widening countries (often supported and built through the European Structural and Investment Funds);
2. talent, as the Widening countries' institutions have a large pool of unexploited talented scientists;
3. future markets, as the Widening countries' institutions are emerging leaders in their respective fields;
4. bigger opportunities to future quality research and innovation partnerships.

❖ **What is the key role and expected activity of the leading institution ("advanced" partner)?**

The key role of the “advanced” partner organisation will be to contribute to the nurturing and development of the research and innovation potential of the widening partner through sharing its own accumulated expertise, reputation, access to international networks, and its experience in management and administration in a specific area of research and innovation. This role will be exercised through the direct partnering and involvement in the setting up of a new or upgrading an existing Centre of Excellence in the Widening country. It is essentially up to the project partnership to propose diverse activities and ways of involvement of the "advanced" partner, which will meet the objectives mentioned above.

❖ **What is meant by the autonomy of the centre?**

For the future Centre of Excellence, such autonomy mainly means being fully autonomous in decision making. Key aspects of it usually cover, among others, autonomy in recruitment/HR issues/salary setting for the Centre of Excellence, financial autonomy, i.e. separate budget line, separate infrastructure building for the Centre of Excellence, academic autonomy in terms of setting its own research agenda, and others.

❖ **Is there any limitation on the number of Teaming proposals submitted by each country?**

There are no restrictions on the number of Teaming proposals by country, as long as the coordinator is located in a Widening country (definition of Widening country is given in [Horizon Europe regulation](#) Art. 2 (17)).

❖ **Is there any geographical or thematic restriction for Teaming proposals?**

No. All proposals are competing against each other on their own merit. The only criterion is the quality of the proposal and there is no country or thematic restrictions.

❖ **Is an institution from a Widening country that is still holding a Teaming grant under Horizon 2020 as coordinator at the moment of application, eligible to become an “advanced” partner?**

In principle, “advanced” and established partners are scientific institutions that have developed an outstanding reputation in research and innovation excellence in the chosen scientific domain and established in another country than a coordinator Member State or Associated Country.

Institutions that are still in the process of development or modernisation, e.g. those that are still receiving support as coordinators from widening actions under Horizon 2020, are normally not considered leading institutions, unless a proper justification is provided for in the proposal.

❖ **Is open science evaluated at stage 1 of the Teaming evaluation?**

Yes, open science is one among several aspects to be evaluated under the ‘Excellence’ criteria of the stage-1 proposals. Applicants should describe how appropriate open science practices are implemented as an integral part of the proposed methodology. The proposal should show how the choice of practices and their implementation are adapted to the nature of the work, in a way that will increase the chances of the project delivering on its objectives. If applicants believe that none of these practices are appropriate for their project, justification should be provided in the proposal.

For specific guidance on open science practices and research data management, please refer to the relevant section of the [Horizon Europe Programme Guide](#).

For further details on open science, please consult the [EU's open science policy](#).

❖ **[What is the page limit for Teaming Stage-1 and Stage-2 applications?](#)**

In the [General Annexes](#) to the Work Programme (Annex A) it is stated that, for a Coordination and Support Action, a general limit is 30 pages and first-stage proposals have a limit of 10 pages.

❖ **[If funding is secured at e.g. European recovery fund, can it be used as a complementary funding for Teaming project?](#)**

If the funding is secured explicitly for that particular project, then by the Letter of Commitment it can be eligible as a complementary funding. This amount cannot be double funding and cannot be committed to any other purpose/project. It also needs to be a cash flow; no in-kind contributions are eligible.

❖ **[How many proposals are expected to be funded under the first Teaming call?](#)**

Based on available budget and depending on the requested funding, it is expected that about 18 proposals can be selected for funding under stage 2 of the Teaming call.

❖ **[Can partners from outside the EU take part, and is there any requirement to "team up" with stronger or weaker regions in terms of research innovation performance in "Widening" countries?](#)**

A Teaming project must involve at least two beneficiaries; the coordinator from a Widening country and at least one leading university or research organisation established in another Member State or Associated Country as an "advanced" partner.

Partners from outside the EU are not excluded, but the proposal must convincingly demonstrate their contribution and added value to the project.

There is no requirement to "team up" with stronger or weaker regions in terms of research innovation performance.

❖ **[How will the complementary funding evaluation of the Stage 2 be implemented?](#)**

A complementary funding equal to the Horizon Europe grant is required and must be received during the project lifespan. The source(s) for this complementary funding can be multiple and of different type - national and/or regional funding, European funding, such as from Cohesion policy programmes, or private sources.

The application form for Teaming stage 2 includes a specific appendix where all relevant information on complementary funding needs to be presented, among others on the sources, amounts, timing and the activities to be funded with the complementary funding. It also has to be made clear how these activities will contribute in reaching the main objectives of the proposal requesting funding under Horizon Europe.

The amounts secured as complementary funding should be confirmed by a Letter of Commitment, for each source of funding. It constitutes a formal binding agreement for funding. Before being uploaded to the submission system (as a standalone PDF-format annex to proposal Part B), the Letter(s) of Commitment needs to be fully completed and duly signed by the entity's competent authority allocating financial appropriations.

The annex will be evaluated together with the full stage-2 proposal. For this purpose, additional experts with specific knowledge on complementary funding sources might be invited to the evaluation panel.

❖ Is there any limitation as to how many partners can participate from a "Widening" country or as leading institutions?

There is no limitation on how many partners can participate from the Widening country, neither from the leading partner's side. The minimum requirement is 1 Widening partner (the coordinator) and 1 leading institution. However, it is crucial that the partnership does not become too complicated and remains operational according to the needs and specificities of the proposed project.

❖ What about the partnership and long-term sustainability of Teaming projects?

A Teaming project should be the result of a joint venture with a long-term horizon of cooperation between the relevant partners from both the "advanced" and widening sides.

Despite the fact that Horizon Europe funding for the Centre of Excellence will stop after the end of the project, partners need to put a lot of effort in this joint venture to continue supporting the new Centre after the grant is over. The aim in the long run is:

1. to achieve sustainability and financial autonomy,
2. to further develop the partnership,
3. to successfully compete for European and international funding, eventually.

Concrete measures of how this (financial) self-sustainability of the Centre will be ensured needs to be convincingly elaborated in the proposal.