

**How to apply
Programme Manual on Priority 1
(Applied Research Projects)**

2. Priority 1: Applied research on territorial development, competitiveness and cohesion: Evidence on European territorial trends, perspectives and policy impacts

The SWOT analysis of the ESPON 2006 Programme, undertaken in the course of setting up the ESPON 2013 Programme, clearly indicates that more applied research action is needed for European policy development and that a thematic bias existed in the previous programme in favour of socio-economic knowledge. Actions foreseen under the first programme priority intend, among other things, to continue building new evidence based on comparable information addressing major territorial challenges and priorities. Furthermore, these actions should contribute to the improvement of the existing EU wide information and to strengthening the knowledge and competence capabilities needed to ensure scientifically validated results.

These objectives will be reached through three main types of actions:

- a) Cross-thematic and thematic analysis (defining territorial potentials and challenges), including studies of territorial trends and prospective studies
- b) Territorial impact studies of EU policies
- c) Knowledge Support System (KSS)

2.1 Applied research projects: Cross-thematic and thematic analysis and territorial impact of EU policies

The applied research within the ESPON 2013 Programme will opt for information and evidence on territorial potentials and challenges focusing on opportunities of success for the development of regions and cities. Cross-thematic applied research will be a major activity integrating existing thematic analysis and adding future analysis of new themes. The impact of EU policies will be another important area of analysis. In support of the applied research actions a Knowledge Support System will be put in place to ensure high quality results (see chapter 2.2).

Applied research projects to be conducted under Priority 1 will be oriented towards the demand of policy makers and adopted by the ESPON Monitoring Committee (MC).

2.1.1 Objective

The first type of applied research actions will lead to a greater European understanding of the complexity of territorial development. The provision of regionalised, updated information will help identifying potential synergies and/or conflicts among different policies and territorial assets and potentials.

By integrating analysis on different themes for the different territories, prospective studies will add a future oriented time dimension which represents a key element for the preparedness of stakeholders to respond to challenges and exploit new and/or under-used opportunities for development.

Territorial impact studies will provide information supporting the monitoring of policy achievements ex-post thereby allowing for a better understanding of the cause-effect relationships at different territorial levels. The development of sufficiently elaborated methodology for ex-ante impact assessment can, in addition, support the territorial awareness in sector policies.

Evidence on territorial impacts of sector policies, both ex-ante and ex-post, will contribute to the improvement of the coordination and mutual synergies between sector policies and create added value for regional policy and territorial cohesion.

2.1.2 Thematic axes

Progress made by the ESPON 2006 Programme shall be further deepened and widened depending on the demand expressed by policy makers involved in ESPON 2013. Exploratory efforts and prospective studies shall support policy relevant themes of the future. The applied research projects under Priority 1 shall pave the way for integrated analytical activity in concrete territorial contexts.

The framework for applied research is organised in 3 thematic axes:

- (1) Territorial development and the competitiveness of regions, urban and rural territories
- (2) Territorial cooperation
- (3) Territorial impact of EU policies

The area for analysis and data collection will normally comprise all the countries taking part in the ESPON 2013 Programme. With regard to a possible enlargement of the geographical coverage of ESPON projects, EU candidate countries (i.e. Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey) and/or the other countries of the Western Balkans (i.e. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Kosovo under UN Security Council Resolution 1244) might be included, if the data situation in these countries for the specific research issues allows so. An extension of the geographical coverage of an applied research project will, however, be subject to a decision by the ESPON MC.

The framework for potential research themes includes policy orientations and priorities related to Cohesion Policy 2007-2013 and to intergovernmental cooperation set out in policy documents, such as the “European Spatial Development Perspective” and the “Territorial Agenda of the EU”.

The thematic orientation of the applied research shall as well be influenced by an assessment of the coverage and gaps within the ESPON 2006 Programme and can take inspiration from the choices made by the MC on preparatory studies, including on small and medium sized cities, the social dimension of territorial development and territorial impacts of environmental policies. In addition, other themes inspired by user demand can be considered for additional applied research.

In some cases, projects of applied research could be supported by case studies, subject to decision by the ESPON MC.

2.1.3 Mapping the demand

The demand from policy development by members of the ESPON MC will be the key selection criteria for the thematic orientations of applied research projects. Themes in support of territorial cohesion and cooperation will be given high priority along with themes related to the Lisbon Strategy and a sustainable economic development. At any rate, applied research within the ESPON 2013 Programme will give priority to integrated analysis, taking into account several sectors, themes, and/or different territorial dimensions.

Decisions on applied research actions will be taken at several moments in the course of programme implementation. The thematic orientations within the ESPON 2013 Programme should not and cannot be fully decided in advance for a seven year long programme period. Flexibility will have to prevail, giving the MC the opportunity to make thematic choices as policy develops.

A Concertation Committee (CC) will facilitate this process by proposing strategic issues that may be analysed in the framework of applied research projects under Priority 1. It can also give guidance to the ESPON 2013 Programme in relation to the European political agenda, thereby ensuring that territorial evidence can be available at the right moment in time to feed policy development.

In order to map the demand for relevant thematic issues, consultations of stakeholders will be undertaken within the programme period 2007-2013. These will be conducted in the form of questionnaires disseminated widely among stakeholders at European, national and regional levels working on issues related to territorial development and in the context of European programmes related to Structural Funds 2007-2013 (particularly other transnational cooperation programmes). To allow for transparency of this screening process, the questionnaires will be put on the ESPON website to make them accessible to stakeholders that might not be included in a mailing initiative. The ESPON Newsletter will refer to the consultation process to make sure that an extensive number of stakeholders are informed.

Furthermore, ESPON seminars and/or other major events in the context of European territorial development and cohesion policy (e.g. DG meetings) could be made use of to discuss the demand of stakeholders.

The results of these consultations will be processed and condensed by the Coordination Unit (CU), breaking them down in thematic orientations which will then be subject to an intensive dialogue with the MC. The CC can give additional guidance in this process by making the link to the respective current European political agenda.

At least three major rounds of selection of actions by the MC are envisaged to ensure an efficient operation. In addition, single actions might also be decided.

2.1.4 Deliveries and outputs expected

The analytical activities of projects financed under Priority 1 will have to address territorial elements, types and phenomena in a given socio-economic context. Projects will have to approach the issues raised in the project specification developed for each project, by

providing solid analysis demonstrating a clear understanding of territorial structures, trends, perspectives and impacts in relation to the socio-economic reality.

Project results shall reflect current scientific knowledge and methodological standards should be presented in such a way to ensure their practical use. Project teams will be requested to strictly follow the given timetable for the implementation of the project in order to coordinate and fit into the relevant political agenda.

The geographical coverage of projects will normally include all the regions and countries taking part in the ESPON 2013 Programme with as much detail as possible, depending on the availability of comparative data. However, the MC might decide to launch a limited number of analysis and studies focusing on smaller geographical entities. It might also initiate projects zooming-out in territorial terms to receive information on a wider context and/or on regions and neighbouring countries or continents not participating in the ESPON 2013 Programme. Regarding the inclusion of EU candidate countries (i.e. Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey) and/or the other countries of the Western Balkans (i.e. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Kosovo under UN Security Council Resolution 1244) in applied research projects, Transnational Project Groups (TPGs) will be asked to assess the respective data situation for the specific research issue they are working on, and to report on that in their inception report. If the data situation allows so, these countries would be covered as well.

The following deliveries are expected from project teams conducting applied research projects:

- **Presentations** of the status-quo of the applied research at **ESPON seminars** which will be organised twice per year¹.
- Data and maps produced within the framework of the research projects have to be delivered in a format which allows their inclusion in the ESPON Scientific Platform (for maps this should be in a vector format stored in .eps, .pdf or .ai files, whereas for databases this can be in any MS Access compatible format). Maps should be created in two separate layers so that they lend themselves better to further use. The first layer should consist of the map itself, i.e. geographical limits, colours, symbols used in the map, etc. The second layer refers to the legend and captions of a map that could be translated by Member States and Partner States to their respective language to ensure a better dissemination to regional and/or local stakeholders. The maps have to be delivered both in a resolution format which is suitable for presentations, web services, etc., and in a high-resolution format (minimum 300 dpi) which can be easily used for printing. Regarding the development of new data and maps and/or the use of existing data, TPGs working on projects under Priority 1 should in any case closely cooperate with the TPG being in charge of the development of the ESPON 2013 Database.
- Delivery of **models developed** within the framework of the research project to be included in the ESPON tool box and be made accessible to others.
- **Dissemination of project results** in the framework of international conferences and seminars, e.g. transnational activities of the ESPON Contact Point (ECP) Network, events

¹ If this seems reasonable, depending on the period of time the project will have been underway by the time of the first ESPON seminar within the project's period of implementation (at least 5-6 months). Depending on the nature of the ESPON seminar – internal seminar or one open to all those interested in the programme and its achievements – the presentations will have to address different aspects of the project. (Whereas in an internal seminar individual steps of project development and advancement will be interesting for the audience, in the framework of an external seminar the eventual findings should be in the focus of the presentation.)

organised by the CU. Dissemination activities must be foreseen in the project proposal and be included in a specific work package number 3 “Dissemination” which implementation should run at least six months after the delivery of the project’s final report. However, project teams should consider that their core activity is applied research. The allocation of resources across all work packages shall consequently reflect this aspect. In addition, to ensure the consistency of a project’s dissemination activities with respective activities organised at Programme level, the project team should take into consideration the objectives and actions of Priority 4 of the ESPON 2013 Programme “Capitalisation, ownership and participation: Capacity building, dialogue and networking”, make use of these facilities and opt for complementarity.

In addition to the above, the following series of outputs is compulsory:

- An **Inception report**, consisting of max. 20 pages (plus annexes if relevant), based on the approach outlined in the project proposal, and to be submitted twelve weeks after the Kick-off Meeting. The Inception report consists of two parts. In its content part it should provide a more detailed overview of the research approach to be applied, the methodology and hypothesis for further investigation, as well as the main literature, data sources, etc. In addition, it should reveal the distribution of work packages among partners. Furthermore, in its financial part - with the completion of the template provided by the Programme - the Inception report should as well detail the break down of the project’s budget on the individual partners per budget line. It should be demonstrated by the TPG how the individual work packages are going to be synthesised to produce a coherent project report. The Inception report should throughout the lifetime of the project serve as a basis for assessment of project development. Whenever progress reports or Interim report(s) are submitted they should be checked in relation to the Inception report to see whether progress is being made on the content within the timeframe foreseen.
- One or two **Interim report(s)** depending on the project duration, consisting of max. 50 pages (plus annexes if relevant), and containing an executive summary, outline of methodology, presentation of main results achieved so far, and description of further proceeding.
- **Draft final report**, consisting of max. 50 pages (plus an executive summary of max. 10 pages) of the main results, an analysis of the results including description of territorial development trends and resulting impacts, both short term and long term, interpretation of newly produced maps and – in the case the research addresses themes being dealt with by ESPON 2006 and produces opposing results - an explanation of these differences, and a presentation of proposals for further European applied research, case studies, etc.
- **Final report**, as a revised and improved version of the draft final report on the basis of comments received from the MC, the Sounding Board² and the CU. Please note that the Final report of max. 50 pages is considered as the main output of the applied research project.

All above mentioned reports will have to be delivered both, in a printed version via mail directed to the postal address of the ESPON CU as well as digitally by e-mail directed to the ESPON CU (in case the size of the files does not allow for sending by e-mail the reports can be delivered by upload on the dedicated programme intranet.) Aiming at full transparency the CU will upload reports received on the ESPON website. Deadlines for the submission of the

² For each applied research project a Sounding Board will be set up, accompanying the project throughout its life cycle and giving advice to the TPG on both, scientific issues as well as relevance for policy makers. Sounding Boards will normally be made up of one scientist and one practitioner. Their tasks will consist of assessing project proposals, giving continuous feedback to TPGs and commenting on their reports.

above mentioned reports will be indicated in the project specifications and in the Subsidy Contract and will coincide with the deadlines for the submission of progress reports whose approval will allow for the release of the reimbursement of the incurred costs.

2.1.5 Application procedure

All applied research projects financed under this priority will be subject to calls for proposals. For each thematic issue a project specification will be compiled responding to the research framework described above.

As soon as the launch of a particular call for proposals will have been decided upon by the MC, a pre-announcement of the call will be issued, providing information on the themes that will be included in the call. The pre-announcement will be widely published by adding it to the ESPON website, in the ESPON newsletter as well as in the Official Journal of the European Commission, C series. At the same time, the Member and Partner States participating in the ESPON 2013 Programme will be informed about the planned call so that the information can be nationally disseminated to potential Lead and Project Partners. The pre-announcement will normally be issued eight weeks prior to the publication of the call for proposals.

The pre-announcement procedure is supposed to facilitate the submission of a proposal at a later stage, by giving interested beneficiaries the chance to prepare on beforehand. The pre-announcement offers an opportunity to incorporate ideas of all partners equally, thus ensuring a high level of commitment to the project. As an additional advantage, partners can test how the cooperation works during this preparatory phase before starting implementing actual project activities.

Upon the publication of the call for proposals – via the same channels as the pre-announcement – the respective project specifications will be made available on the website of the ESPON CU (www.espon.eu), outlining the thematic scope of the project, its general objectives, and primary research issues envisaged as well as expected results and a timetable for deliveries.

Calls for proposals will usually be kept open for two months (40-45 working days). Proposals should be submitted according to the application requirements provided and specified in application packs. Standardised application forms will be provided by the ESPON 2013 Programme. Automatic registration of proposals will be ensured.

2.1.6 Selection procedure

The selection procedure starts immediately after the deadline set for submitting project proposals. It consists of two distinct assessment parts, an eligibility check and an evaluation. The two parts will time-wise run in parallel. The MC will first decide on the eligibility of proposals received before addressing the results of the content related evaluation resulting in a ranking of the best proposals. The MC will select the best eligible proposal according to the ranking resulting from the content related evaluation. The MC takes the final decision on project approval.

Eligibility criteria

Project proposals will be checked against the eligibility criteria in order to ensure that they fulfil the technical requirements of the Programme. The eligibility assessment will be performed by the CU.

The check of the eligibility criteria will be documented by ticking boxes of “yes” or “no”, depending on whether the respective evidence has been provided or not. Each project proposal to be assessed has to fulfil the following criteria:

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA
1. Application has been submitted in due time in original and electronic version ³ .
2. Application is complete and includes the requested administrative forms, supporting documents as well as an anonymous project proposal (the list of supporting documents required will be provided in the specific call), all properly filled according to the detailed instructions provided in Part A and Part B of the Application Form.
3. The content of the proposal relates to the topic(s) set out in the call.
4. The partnership involves at least the minimum number of participants given in the specific call.
5. All partners are eligible (including that solvency of private partners involved is confirmed by the respective Member/Partner State)
6. The budget limits have been respected.

In case the CU should detect, during the eligibility check phase, one or more of the following omissions in applications received within the deadline given, which would lead to the application being deemed ineligible, the respective Lead Partner will be informed in written by fax and offered a maximum of **seven working days** (counting from the day following the day of receipt of the fax as documented by the transmission report) to correct the omission(s).

The correctable omissions are the following:

- Missing supporting documents **in paper version** as requested in the call: the two annexes of Application Form Part A (3.5b management chart and 3.6b financial flow chart) and as well as solvency documents (if relevant);
- Missing signature and/or missing stamp on a document;
- Missing supporting documents **in electronic version** as requested in the call: the two annexes of Application Form Part A (3.5b management chart and 3.6b financial flow chart).

³ You are advised to keep a proof of the submission of the postal version within the set deadline in case no date stamp is placed on the envelope by the postal services. Following the electronic submission you will receive an automatic confirmation that your email has successfully reached the programme mailbox. Should you not get the automatic confirmation mail, please check that the application was sent to the correct address and/or that no other error has occurred in order to avoid any problem with the eligibility of your proposal.

- Correction of discrepancies in the electronic version of the proposal submitted compared to the paper version sent to the MA (CU) by post, which is considered the valid application in legal terms.

In the first two cases, the listed missing and/or corrected documents, duly signed and stamped, shall be dispatched in original to the CU by registered express delivery within **seven working days** (counting from the day following the day of receipt of the fax as documented by the transmission report). In case of missing electronic versions of supporting documents as well as discrepancies between the electronic and the paper version of the submitted application, the electronic version corresponding to the paper version submitted shall be sent by email to the CU (to the email address indicated in the communication) within **seven working days** (counting from the day following the day of receipt of the fax as documented by the transmission report).

Any document delivered after the deadline given will not be considered and the proposal will be deemed not eligible. It is advised to all applicants to keep a proof of the sending of the requested documents within the deadline (e.g. receipt of the post office clearly indicating the sending date).

The Lead Applicants of ineligible applications will receive a notification letter specifying the non-fulfilled eligibility criteria.

Evaluation criteria

In parallel with the eligibility check, the evaluation of all project proposals takes place. The Evaluation Committee will be made up of MC members or experts nominated by the MC, representative(s) of the European Commission and a representative of the relevant Sounding Board, normally a scientist. MC members should be prepared to participate in an Evaluation Committee on a rotating basis.

The check of compliance with the evaluation criteria is based on a scoring system and results in a ranking list of all project proposals received.

This step in the selection procedure serves to assess the relevance of the proposals regarding the priorities and objectives of the ESPON 2013 Programme and of the specific call to which they respond. It also looks into the impact of each proposed project, i.e. its importance for stakeholders involved in territorial development on EU, national and regional level.

The evaluation will be based on three types of selection criteria:

- Content related criteria, referring to the anonymous scientific part of the proposal;
- Management related criteria, and
- Partnership related criteria.

<u>Content Related Criteria</u>
1. Sound concept and quality of the objectives and deliveries (e.g. can the objectives be realistically achieved through the proposed approach and methodology?).

2. Position/innovation in relation to the state-of-the-art in scientific excellence (e.g. do the approach and the results aimed at bring a clear added value compared to other current or past initiatives?).
3. Contribution to advancement of knowledge (e.g. is the project of complementary character to existing research and will not duplicate existing work?).
4. Quality and effectiveness of scientific methodology and associated work plan (e.g. are the components of the work plan logically interlinked?).
5. Contribution to the expected results and impacts of the programme (e.g. how many themes and policies have been deepened and widened within each project compared to ESPON 2006 results?).
6. Appropriateness of measures for the dissemination of project results (e.g. are they conceived in such a way that the adequate target group can be reached?).

Management Related Criteria

1. Appropriateness and clarity of the management structure and the plan for project implementation (e.g. is the Lead Partner experienced in project management? Are procedures for decision-making and monitoring transparent? Is the timing for individual work packages and the overall work plan convincing?).
2. Transparency of procedures related to ERDF requirements (e.g. are the required audit procedures, that need to be established, in place and are all project partners aware of them?).
3. Appropriateness of the allocation and justification of the resources (budget and staff) among the different work packages and project partners (e.g. is the break down of budget to partners adequate?).

Partnership Related Criteria

1. Quality and relevance of the presented competences/expertise and of the transnational project group as a whole (e.g. do the relevant partners involved, contribute the required knowledge and experience and are their specific fields of expertise taken account of?).
2. Quality and relevance of experience of the individual partners (e.g. does the accumulated academic and professional background of the team enable them to deal with the thematic and methodological challenges of the project?).

Each criterion will be awarded a score between 0 – 5. Half marks can be given, too. The scores indicate the following with respect to the criterion under examination:

- 0 - The proposal fails to address the criterion under examination or cannot be judged due to missing or incomplete information.
- 1 - Very poor. The criterion is addressed in a cursory and unsatisfactory manner.
- 2 - Poor. There are serious inherent weaknesses in relation to the criterion in question.
- 3 - Fair. While the proposal broadly addresses the criterion, there are significant weaknesses that would need correcting.
- 4 - Good. The proposal addresses the criterion well, although certain improvements are possible.

- 5 - Excellent. The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion in question. Any shortcomings are minor.

Each group of selection criteria has a total number of points. No weighting will be applied. However each criterion should be scored with a value of at least 3. Proposals that fail to achieve the minimum score will not be further considered in the selection procedure.

The Evaluation Committee will convene after the closure of the call. Evaluators will assess and mark the proposals exactly as they are described and presented. The evaluation will follow a two step approach: assessment and scoring of (1) the anonymous content related part and (2) the management and partnership related part. Evaluators will not make assumptions or interpretations about the project in addition to what is in the proposal. Concise and explicit concluding justification will be given for each proposal as well as comments to scores, where relevant for the evaluator. Evaluation forms with no concluding comments will be declared inadmissible. Recommendations for improvements to be discussed as part of a possible contracting will be given, if needed.

Once all the members of the Evaluation Committee have completed their individual assessments, the evaluation proceeds to a consensus discussion, supposed to represent the common views and comments of the evaluators. The consensus discussion, which also includes a ranking of proposals, is moderated by the CU who also writes a consensus report containing recommendations for improvements of proposals suggested by the Evaluation Committee. Consensus reports with hand-written corrections of scoring will be declared inadmissible.

Provided that several proposals score equally, other factors might as well be taken into account:

- A reasonable geographical distribution of project partners.
- A reasonable involvement of partners from Member States having entered the EU after 1 January 2004.

The CU is responsible for a final review of the consensus report for each project specification included in the call. The main objectives of this process are:

- To review cases where a minority view was recorded in the consensus report;
- To recommend a priority order for proposals to the MC on the basis of the consensus report in the case where the Evaluation Committee could not reach a consensus on the best proposal and/or in the case of equal scoring of several proposals that will require the MC to consider the additional factors mentioned above.

Taking into account the importance of the TPG's managerial capabilities for the correct project implementation, the Managing Authority (MA) will, through the CU, separately assess the "Management Related Criteria" of the submitted proposals. Should the result of this separate and independent assessment be different from or add to the one obtained by the Evaluation Committee, the recommendations of the CU to the MC will take this opinion of the MA into account.

By signing confidentiality agreements (using no-conflict-of-interest forms) members of the Evaluation Committee guarantee their independence and impartiality during the assessment as well as that the privacy and confidentiality of all proposals will be kept. Declarations of no-conflict-of-interest with negligence mistakes are declared inadmissible. The content of the proposals should not be published or forwarded to persons or institutions which are not

directly engaged in the evaluation or decision making. The project idea itself, as well as the description and concept of the project and the structure of the application, remain the property of the project applicant.

Decision making

As indicated in the previous section, the decisions on approved projects will be made by the MC of the ESPON 2013 Programme, based on the results of the eligibility and evaluation processes. For each theme, the MC will approve the best eligible proposal resulting from the ranking of the content related evaluation (only one proposal will be approved for each of the theme).

This decision will be notified to all Lead Applicants soon after the MC decision. All the Lead Partners of the approved projects will receive a letter from the MA(CU) stating the decision of the MC as well as the total ERDF, EU Member States' and eventually Partner States' national funds approved. The MC decision may include certain conditions, recommendations and/or suggestions for improvements. In this case, the process of contracting, managed by the CU, will include a necessary revision/amendment of the project proposal. The result of this procedure will be the basis for concluding a Subsidy Contract.

All the Lead Applicants of the ineligible or non-approved proposals will receive a notification letter with a brief explanation related to the assessment results. In case Lead Partners of ineligible or non-approved proposals are not satisfied with the decision of the MC, they may put forward an appeal (for more details on the appeal procedure, please refer to chapter 8.12 of the Programme Manual).

2.1.7 Contract and duration

The proposals that are selected for funding and that fulfil the conditions set by the MC will receive a Subsidy Contract, closed between the MA and the respective Lead Partner of the project. The Subsidy Contract shall determine the rights and responsibilities of the Lead Partner and the MA, the scope of activities to be carried out, terms of funding, requirements for reporting and financial controls, etc.

A model of the Subsidy Contract is available on the Programme website (www.espon.eu).

2.1.8 Budget

TPGs conducting an applied research project will be granted a subsidy covering 100% of the real eligible costs incurred for carrying out the project approved. Funding will be made available by the ERDF, the national co-financing will be ensured by EU Member States at programme level and, eventually, by Partner States. Each call will indicate the maximum budget available related to individual project specifications included in the call.

2.2 Knowledge Support System

Within the framework of Priority 1 of the ESPON 2013 Programme, a Knowledge Support System (KSS) will be set up to make sure that projects of applied territorial research will have a sound scientific base and meet a sufficient degree of scientific quality. The KSS will be implemented as a project led by the Managing Authority. The KSS will materialise in several independently operating Sounding Boards, each of which will be responsible for one research project under Priority 1.

2.2.1 Composition and role of the Sounding Board in Priority 1 actions

A Sounding Board will be made up of two experts, ideally one scientist and one practitioner, both experienced in the respective thematic field of research. This composition shall ensure that both, a high scientific quality as well as the user perspective of practitioners will be catered for.

Experts in a Sounding Board will play an advisory role, providing continuous feedback and guidance to the transnational project group (TPG). By doing that, the Sounding Board ensures that projects pursue the approach outlined in the Inception report, and that eventually the expectations underlying the call for proposals will be met.

In order to make best use of the expertise of the Sounding Board from an early stage on, one representative should be involved in the evaluation of project proposals. The CU will make a proposal to the MC on who of the two Sounding Board members should be in the Evaluation Committee. Since an important aspect of the evaluation is to assess the scientific quality of the proposed research approaches, it would normally be the more scientific member of the Sounding Board taking part in the Evaluation Committee.

Sounding Boards will closely follow the progress made by the TPGs and their work will be coordinated by the CU.

The main activities of the project Sounding Boards are:

1. Assessing the project proposals,
2. Giving advice to TPGs,
3. Assessing the results of the applied research projects.

2.2.2 Expertise needed

Experts (i.e. scientists and/or practitioners) taking part in a Sounding Board must have a verifiable sufficient professional experience in a specific field of applied territorial research of the ESPON 2013 Programme. They shall prove their competence by their CV, stating the different stages of their professional career and the main issues they have been dealing with, either in the form of applied research projects being involved in or in the form of research conducted and courses of higher education taught. If applicable, they should add a list of relevant publications they wrote or contributed to.

As mentioned above, the ideal Sounding Board will consist of one scientist from within the field of research addressed by a particular project and one practitioner. While the scientist would concentrate on providing feedback on e.g. research approach, methodologies, etc., the practitioner would focus on keeping a close link between the research going on and the applicability of its results in practice. Against this background, scientists taking part in a Sounding Board need to demonstrate the following expertise:

- Research experience within the precise thematic scope of the project, including insight in relevant territorial structures and territorial trends in the EU 27, candidate and neighbouring countries;
- Research knowledge and expertise in European territorial development, EU Cohesion Policy, as well as all relevant Community policies;
- Profound knowledge of the results of the ESPON 2006 Programme;
- Sound analytical skills and competence in assessing outcomes of research;
- Experience of working in a multidisciplinary team in a transnational setting.

Practitioners, however, should have a comprehensive overview of the information need of stakeholders in the particular field of research to continuously feed that into the project. Acquaintance with the ESPON 2006 Programme and its results would be an additional benefit.

All experts participating in the KSS have to demonstrate very good oral and written communication skills in English, especially regarding text drafting. They should also be prepared to work with deadlines, give advice to project partners, and be easily reached by phone and email.

Finally, potential experts should be familiar with the ESPON 2013 Programme, its objectives, priorities and structure.

2.2.3 Tasks and outputs expected from Sounding Boards

Sounding Boards are expected to be active in specific moments of the project life cycle, as outlined below, and to produce the following outputs:

1. Assessment of content and partnership in submitted project proposals
In order to achieve a high quality level of projects, one of the two Sounding Board experts will be involved in the evaluation of submitted project proposals. The expert will be expected to present strengths and weaknesses regarding the content of the proposals as well as the partnership behind, in relation to the evaluation criteria.
2. Meetings with TPG
Sounding Boards are expected to meet with the TPG at specific moments of the project life cycle. In principle, Sounding Boards and TPGs are expected to meet and discuss:
 - a) Following the submission of the Inception Report;
 - b) Following the submission of the Draft Final Report.The meetings should serve the purpose of discussing and clarifying the project reports and results. The exact number of meetings will depend on the project's duration and consequently on the number of reports to be delivered. To make sure that the advice of the Sounding Board can be taken into account by the TPG it will be included, together with comments from the MC, in a CU response to the TPG on the respective report.
3. Commenting project reports

Experts will be asked to give comments in written on the Interim, the Draft Final and Final reports. The exact number of assessments will depend on the number of reports delivered.

Comments on reports will be directed to the CU who will compile all comments received, i.e. from the MC, from ECPs, and forward them to the TPG.

4. Assessment of Final report

At the end of the project life cycle, Sounding Boards will be asked to assess the final report submitted by the respective TPG.

The following table gives an overview of the indicative involvement of the Sounding Board at the different stages of project development:

Evolution of project	Involvement of Sounding Board	Working days required (in total for both SB-members)
Project proposals	Yes – assessment (one SB member)	1
Inception report	Yes - commenting	2
Meeting TPG - Sounding Board	Yes	2
Interim report ⁴	Yes – commenting	2
Draft Final report	Yes – commenting	2
Meeting TPG - Sounding Board	Yes	2
Final report	Yes – assessment	2
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2.2.4 Application procedure

Experts with a specific thematic background will be selected through a call for expression of interest procedure. However, in case of not receiving enough qualified applications, the MC might take a decision on nominating external experts. Obviously, that kind of decision should be properly justified and the selection be made transparent for audit purposes. Therefore, a scoring procedure will be applied. Only candidates achieving a minimum of 60% of the total score and at least 50% in each of the three evaluation criteria can be considered as qualified enough to be an expert in the ESPON KSS.

It is expected that a call for expression of experts' interest will be launched once every 2-3 years. A list of the specific themes and territorial issues that are relevant within the ESPON 2013 Programme will be included in the call for interest to indicate the expertise needed. The call for interest will be published via the ESPON website, the ESPON newsletter and the Official Journal of the European Commission, C Series. At the same time, the Member and Partner States participating in the ESPON 2013 Programme will be informed about the call so

⁴ Normally, only one interim report is foreseen per project.

that the information can be nationally disseminated. An application pack will be made available by the CU via the ESPON website.

The calls for expression of interest will normally be opened at least 2 months prior to the launch of a call for project proposals, so respective Sounding Boards will be up and running by the time submitted project proposals will need to be selected. Calls for expression of interest by experts will be kept open for two months (40-45 working days).

Experts interested in being member of a Sounding Board will be asked to send their application form, their CV and any relevant supporting documents to the CU, both by email and in hard copies (one original and one copy). Automatic registration of applications will be ensured.

Experts who will have successfully passed the selection procedure will be included in a database, hosted and maintained by the CU. The exact expertise gathered in the database as well as the availability of experts at the time needed will also influence the frequency and the total number of calls for experts' interest.

Experts for Sounding Boards will be selected in two steps: Firstly, a pre-selection of experts will be made by the CU (MC) from the pool of experts established via calls for expression of interest. The pre-selected experts will be informed about the timing of the relevant evaluation session. Secondly, following the closure of the subsequent call for proposals for applied research projects, the ESPON CU will check submitted proposals for potential conflict of interest with regard to an affiliation of the pre-selected experts to partners behind project proposals. Thereafter, the composition of Sounding Boards will be confirmed by nominating the respective experts and proceeding their contracting.

Applicants for the ESPON KSS should be aware that their participation in a Sounding Board will routinely be deemed impossible if they are legally employed by an institution involved in a proposal submitted for the project that they should follow.

During evaluations of proposals for applied research projects, all selected experts will be asked to sign declarations of no-conflict-of-interest.

2.2.5 Selection procedure

The selection procedure starts immediately after the deadline set for submitting expressions of interest. It consists of two distinct assessment parts, an eligibility check and an evaluation, and will be concluded with a ranking list of experts that is forwarded to the MC which takes the final decision.

Eligibility criteria

The check of the eligibility criteria will be documented by ticking boxes of “yes” and “no”, depending on whether the respective evidence has been provided or not. Each expression of interest to be evaluated has to fulfil the following criteria:

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA
1. Expression of interest has been submitted in due time in original and electronic version ⁵ .
2. Expression of interest is complete and includes the requested administrative forms, as well as supporting documents, fully and properly filled in according to the detailed instructions provided in the Application Form.
3. The content of the expression of interest relates to the themes and territorial issues set out in the ESPON 2013 Programme, Annex V.2.1.
4. Applicants fulfil the eligibility criteria specified in the call for interest.

In case the CU should detect, during the eligibility check phase, one or more of the following omissions in applications received within the deadline given, which would lead to the application being deemed ineligible, the respective applicant will be informed in written by fax (in case of non-availability of a fax by registered mail) and offered a maximum of **seven working days** (counting from the day following the day of receipt of the fax as documented by the transmission report respectively the day following the day of receipt of the registered mail) to correct the omission(s).

The correctable omissions are the following:

- Missing supporting documents **in paper version** as requested in the call (CV, and annexes if relevant).
- Missing signature and/or missing stamp (if available) on a document.
- Missing supporting documents **in electronic version** as requested in the call (CV, and annexes if relevant).
- Correction of discrepancies in the electronic version of the proposal submitted compared to the paper version sent to the MA (CU) by post, which is considered the valid application in legal terms.

In the first two cases, the listed missing and/or corrected documents, duly signed and stamped (if applicable), shall be dispatched in original to the CU by registered express delivery within **seven working days** (counting from the day following the day of receipt of the fax as documented by the transmission report).

In case of missing electronic version of supporting documents as well as discrepancies between the electronic and the paper version of the submitted application, the electronic version corresponding to the paper version submitted shall be sent by email to the CU (to the email address indicated in the communication) within **seven working days** (counting from the day following the day of receipt of the fax as documented by the transmission report).

⁵ You are advised to keep a proof of the submission of the postal version within the set deadline in case no date stamp is placed on the envelope by the postal services. Following the electronic submission you will receive an automatic confirmation that your email has successfully reached the programme mailbox. Should you not get the automatic confirmation mail, please check that the application was sent to the correct address and/or that no other error has occurred in order to avoid any problem with the eligibility of your expression of interest.

Any document delivered after the deadline given will not be considered and the EoI will be deemed not eligible. It is advised to all applicants to keep a proof of the sending of the requested documents within the deadline (e.g. receipt of the post office clearly indicating the sending date).

Evaluation criteria

The second phase of the assessment starts normally following the decision of the MC on the eligibility outcome. This second step in the selection procedure serves to assess the relevance and quality of the expressions of interest regarding the specific call to which they respond.

The evaluation is based on a scoring system and results in a ranking list of the applications submitted.

<u>Evaluation Criteria</u>
1. Excellence in research/research management or in policy development and/or implementation (e.g. number of years of professional experience in territorial development/planning as researcher, consultant or practitioner).*
2. International project experience (e.g. number and scale of transnational (research) projects the applicant was involved in).*
3. Expertise in the specific thematic field the applicant expresses his/her interest for (e.g. number of publications in the field, number of years of practical experience in the theme).

Each criterion will be awarded a score between 0 – 5. Half marks can be given, too. The scores indicate the following with respect to the criterion under examination:

- 0 - The proposal fails to address the criterion under examination or cannot be judged due to missing or incomplete information.
- 1 - Very poor. The criterion is addressed in a cursory and unsatisfactory manner.
- 2 - Poor. There are serious inherent weaknesses in relation to the criterion in question.
- 3 - Fair. While the proposal broadly addresses the criterion, there are significant weaknesses that would need correcting.
- 4 - Good. The proposal addresses the criterion well, although certain improvements are possible.
- 5 - Excellent. The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion in question. Any shortcomings are minor.

The first two evaluation criteria (marked with *) should be scored with a value of at least 3. Expressions of interest that fail to achieve the minimum score for these two criteria will not be further considered in the selection procedure. Regarding the third evaluation criterion, a score below 3 in one or more thematic fields selected by the applicant can be accepted if there is at least one thematic field for which the applicant receives the minimum score of 3. Those thematic fields for which an applicant would receive a score below 3 would not be considered as fields of expertise of the applicant. Therefore, the applicant would, upon approval of the MC, only be recorded in the KSS database for the thematic fields in which she/he would have received the minimum score of 3.

The expressions of interest will be marked and assessed exactly as they are described and presented. No assumptions or interpretations will be made in addition to what is in the application. Concise but explicit justification will be given for each score. Evaluation forms with no concluding comments will be declared inadmissible. Equally, evaluation forms carrying handwritten corrections of scoring are declared inadmissible if they are not accompanied by handwritten initials.

The assessment will be prepared for the MC by the CU. Once the CU will have completed the individual assessment, the evaluation proceeds to a consensus stage, representing the common views of those having taken part in the assessment of applications. In this framework, the CU will also propose ideal combinations of experts for Sounding Boards, taking into account their theoretical and practical background as well as geographical balance. A consensus report covering both, a ranking list of individual experts as well as a suggestion for specific Sounding Boards will be produced and forwarded to the MC for their selection of experts. Consensus reports with hand-written corrections of scoring will be declared inadmissible.

Provided that two or more experts score equally in the same theme, other factors might as well be taken into account:

- A reasonable geographical distribution of experts.
- A reasonable involvement of experts from Member States having entered the EU after 1st of January 2004.

The content of the expressions of interest should not be published or forwarded to persons or institutions which are not directly engaged in the evaluation or decision making.

Decision making

Based on the consensus report provided by the CU, the MC will select the best combination of experts for Sounding Boards related to applied research projects. Besides, the MC will indicate experts who will be involved in the evaluation of project proposals. The MC will also approve a reserve list of experts who might be contracted in case of any problem of signing the contracts with originally elected experts.

The decision of the MC will be notified to all applicants having submitted an expression of interest soon after the MC meeting.

Those experts, who will have passed the evaluation but will not immediately be selected to participate in a specific Sounding Board, will be recorded in a database by the CU. Once experts are recorded in this database for potential Sounding Board members they will remain there until the end of the programming period, unless they ask for deletion.

All the Lead Applicants of the ineligible or non-approved EoI will receive a notification letter with brief information on the assessment results. In case Lead Applicants of ineligible or non-approved EoI are not satisfied with the decision of the MC, they may put forward an appeal (for more detail on the appeal procedure, please refer to chapter 8.12 of the Programme Manual).

2.2.6 Contract and duration

The MA will conclude individual service contracts with each of the selected experts. Contracts between experts and the MA will outline the obligations of experts as well as their relations to the TPG and the CU. The contract will be valid throughout the lifetime of the applied research project, for some experts also covering the project selection procedure. Experts' contract duration will depend on the particular project the expert is responsible for.

2.2.7 Budget

The total contracted sum will depend on the number of expected working days (depending on the length of the applied research project the Sounding Board is going to advice) and the number of outputs that are going to be requested. In any case, the contracted sum would be limited to 750 €per working day all taxes included.

Furthermore, costs incurred for travelling and accommodation in relation to Sounding Board tasks will be reimbursed by the CU according to the travel reimbursement rules that will be communicated to the experts. However, subsistence costs must not exceed the usual thresholds set by the ESPON 2013 Programme. Travel reimbursement rules and thresholds are available on the ESPON website (www.espon.eu).

Payments (interim and final) to the experts will be made upon submission of the relevant invoice accompanied by a short activity report listing the tasks accomplished, the meetings attended and copies of comments/assessments/deliveries provided to the CU during the relevant period covered by the invoice. Payments will be released within 45 days from the approval of the activities and relevant deliveries by the MA of the ESPON 2013 Programme.

