

2014 to 2020 European Structural and Investment Funds Growth Programme

Call for Proposals European Social Fund

Priority Axis 3: Technical Assistance

Managing Authority:	Department for Work and Pensions
ESI Fund:	European Social Fund
Priority Axis:	Priority Axis 3: Technical Assistance
Call Reference:	OC08S19P1344
LEP Area Indicative Fund Allocation:	£1m ESF
Call Open:	18th of March 2019
Call Closes:	14th of April 2019

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1. Introduction

The 2014 to 2020 European Structural and Investment Funds bring the European Regional Development Fund, European Social Fund and part of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development together into a single European Union Structural Investment Funds Growth Programme for England supporting the key growth priorities of innovation, research and development, support for small and medium enterprises, low carbon, skills, employment, and social inclusion.

The government has confirmed that it will guarantee EU funding for structural and investment fund projects signed before the UK's departure from the EU, even when these projects continue after we leave the EU.

As a result, British businesses and other organisations will have additional certainty over future funding and should continue to apply for EU funding while the UK remains a member of the EU.

Funding for projects will be honored by the government, if they meet good value for money and are in line with domestic strategic priorities. Each government department will take responsibility for the allocation of money to projects in line with these conditions and the wider rules on public spending. The full detail of the announcement can be found at the following [website link](#).

The Funds are managed by the Department for Communities and Local Government for European Regional Development Fund, Department for Work and Pensions for European Social Fund and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. These Departments are the managing authorities for each Fund. In London, the Greater London Authority acts as an Intermediate Body for the European Regional Development Fund and European Social Fund programmes. In some other areas, Intermediate Bodies are being designated by the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Department for Work and Pensions to perform the following tasks:

- Input into project calls in respect of local development needs (with reference to ESI Funds strategies); and
- Assessment of applications against certain selection criteria in relation to fit with local priorities in respect of the European Regional Development Fund and European Social Fund.

The managing authorities and intermediate bodies work closely with local partners on ESI Funds sub-committees in each local enterprise partnership area. Partners on these sub-committees provide:

- Practical advice and information to the managing authorities to assist in the preparation of local plans that contribute towards operational programme priorities and targets;
- Local intelligence to the managing authorities (or intermediate bodies where designated) in the development of project calls that reflect operational programme and local development needs as well as match funding opportunities; and

- Advice on local economic growth conditions and opportunities within the context of the operational programme and the local European Structural and Investment Funds Strategy to aid the managing authorities' (or Intermediate bodies where designated) assessments at outline and full application stage.

This call is published by the Department for Work and Pensions and invites applications in respect of the European Social Fund for England 2014 to 2020.

2. Call Context

On behalf of the national Growth Programme Board, the Departments for Work and Pensions (the ESF Managing Authority) invite applications European Social Funds support under:

Priority Axis 3 Technical Assistance

There are no investment priorities within the Technical Assistance strand of the ESF programme.

The **European Social Fund Operational Programme for England 2014 to 2020** sets out how the funds increase labour market participation, promote social inclusion and develop the skills of the potential and existing workforce (ESF). Priority Axes 3 of the operational programme aims to ensure that activities which fall within the scope of the programme are delivered efficiently and effectively and facilitate access to the ESF programmes.

Any application for funding will be required to clearly demonstrate that it meets the requirement of, and makes meaningful contribution to, the delivery of the relevant priority Axes of the ESF Operational Programme.

In addition, applications will be expected to meet identified local development needs, as expressed in the scope of this call and as set out in the local enterprise partnership areas European Structural and Investment Funds strategy.

Applicants are advised to familiarise themselves with the detail of the operational programme and the relevant LEP area European Structural Investment Funds strategy and the relevant documentation listed in sections 5 and 8 **prior to** submitting an application.

3. Scope of the Call

3.1 Scope

This call invites applications which support the delivery of Priority Axis 3 of the European Social Fund programmes and respond to the local development need set out in the D2N2 European Structural and Investment Funds strategy.

Indicative fund allocation:	Indicatively through this call the managing authorities expect to allocate up to £1m ESF.
Minimum application level	The minimum application value for this Technical Assistance Call is £250,000.
Duration of project activity	Projects should plan to deliver activity for a maximum of three years. Managing authorities do however reserve the right to vary the maximum duration upwards or downwards.
Geographical Scope	The European Social Fund operates on a national basis. All eligible European Social Fund expenditure must benefit the programmes in England. This Call is specifically for Technical Assistance in the D2N2 LEP Area only.
Specific Call Requirements	<p>The objective of Technical Assistance is to support the efficient and compliant management and implementation of the European Social Fund Programme, as well as support robust governance, accountability and partnership engagement. This will help to ensure that the delivery of European Structural and Investment Funds projects, comply with applicable law.</p> <p>The activity that is eligible for support is set out in the Technical Assistance Guidance.</p> <p>Please note: Value for Money and alignment with Domestic Priorities will form a key part of the assessment and appraisal of all applications. Therefore proposals should clearly articulate and demonstrate how activities align with domestic strategic priorities and offer good value for money.</p>
Call deadlines	Applications received after the published call close date will not be considered. All applications will be assessed following closure of the call.

4. Required Outputs under this Call

The specific objective of Technical Assistance is to ensure that the activities which fall within the scope of the programme are managed, monitored and evaluated in line with the Common Provisions Regulation, European Social Fund Regulation and the Commission's delegated and implementing regulations.

This specific objective aims to ensure that the programme is delivered efficiently and effectively. The key measure evidenced through the annual audit authority control report is an unqualified audit opinion from the Audit Authority, which is accepted without reservation by the European Commission. Our objective is to keep the error rate below a threshold of 2%, on both an annual and cumulative basis.

Applicants will need to be able to demonstrate how the eligible activity, funded by the European Social Fund will achieve the programme – level outputs for Priority Axes 3 - [Guidance](#).

Output	
ES/T/O/01	Number of evaluations undertaken by applicants.
ES/T/O/02	Number of publications produced and communication events held.

The managing authorities expect the level of outputs proposed within applications to be realistic and achievable and to deliver good value for money. The application should clearly state the methodology used to determine the levels of outputs proposed.

Projects will only be supported if they demonstrate good value for money. An important consideration when assessing value for money is the level of European Social Fund outputs that the project would deliver.

Applicants will however need to explain how they will collect and record a fully evidenced audit trail for all contracted outputs.

5. Application Process & Prioritisation Methodology

There is a single stage to the European Social Fund application process;

- (i) Full Application.

Applicants must fully complete the [Full Application](#) which will be assessed by the relevant managing authority against all of the national [Selection Criteria](#) except where an intermediate body has been designated to assess against some of the selection criteria.

The Gateway assessment is undertaken by the managing authorities and considers:

- Applicant eligibility;
- Activity and expenditure eligibility; and
- Fit with the National Operational Programme and the local development need set out in section 2.

Applications that fail the Gateway assessment undertaken by the managing authority will be rejected. Applications which pass the Gateway assessment will then be assessed by the managing authority in relation to all Core assessment criteria.

Please note that the managing authority's decision is final. If you wish to complain about the calls and application process, please follow the procedure set out at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-communities-and-local-government/about/complaints-procedure>

Single Local Enterprise Partnership Area, Technical Assistance Applications (European Social Fund (non-Opt-In))

Individual Full Applications relating to a single Local Enterprise Partnership area will be assessed by the Managing Authority. The local European Structural and Investment Funds committee will be asked to provide advice on local economic growth conditions and opportunities within the context of Operational Programmes and the local European Structural and Investment Funds Strategy to aid the Managing Authority's assessment at Full Application stage. The Managing Authorities will make the final decision and if successful a formal offer of grant will be made.

6. General Information

6.1 National Eligibility Rules

When developing an application, applicants should refer to [National Eligibility Rules](#) setting out the requirements of the 2014-2020 European Social Fund programme. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that the National Eligibility Rules are adhered to both at application stage and following approval. Failure to do so can lead to financial penalties leading to recovery of up to 100% of the grant value. If in doubt on any of the requirements, applicants are strongly advised to seek specialist advice.

European Social Fund eligibility rules apply to **all** project spend within the eligible costs, including match funding.

The European Social Fund is governed by European regulations and national rules. Applicants are advised to familiarise themselves with the relevant documentation, (section 8 Key Document refers) prior to submitting an application. If successful at full application stage applicants will enter into a [Funding agreement](#) and must abide by the standard terms and conditions contained therein. Once a Funding agreement has been issued it should be signed and returned within 30 days, unless otherwise agreed with the managing authority. Applicants are therefore strongly advised to read these terms and conditions to ensure that they are able to enter into such an agreement prior to responding to the call.

6.2 Eligible applicants

Section 4 of the [National Eligibility Rules](#) sets out who is eligible to apply. Financial due Diligence checks will be undertaken on non-public sector applicants who submit an application. Checks will be carried out and may exclude applicants from further consideration. These checks will include assessment of the applicant's financial standing including the ability to deal with cost overruns, the ability to cash flow a project in arrears and absorb a financial irregularity. Applicants must be legally constituted at the point of signing a funding agreement. If the application is approved the applicant organisation will enter into a legally binding Funding agreement and

therefore will carry the liability for ensuring that the terms and conditions of the funding agreement are met.

If there is more than one organisation applying for the funds, a lead organisation must be selected to become the applicant (and grant recipient) with the remaining organisation(s) acting as delivery. In this situation the applicant would be responsible and liable for the delivery partner(s) and ensuring the project is operating compliantly.

During the application process the managing authority will consider the applicant's track record, both positive and negative. If the applicant has been involved in the delivery of previous European grants and any irregularities have been identified, the managing authority will expect to see what steps have been taken to ensure that the risk of further irregularities in the future is mitigated. It is acknowledged that some organisations will be new to European Structural and Investment Funds funding and will not have a track record.

6.3 Contribution rate and match funding

European Social Fund investments must not be used to replace existing funding sources. European Social Fund investments must enable activity to take place that would not otherwise happen or to increase the scope, scale or intensity of activity. The level of European Social Funds awarded will be the minimum in order for the project to proceed.

The maximum European Structural and Investment Funds intervention rate for the project is 50% as this Call falls within a More Developed category of region.

The remaining 50% or more must come from other eligible sources as specified under section 6 of the National Eligibility Rules. During the application process applicants will need to satisfy the managing authority that they have, or are able to put in place eligible match funding for the balance of costs. Other EU funds cannot be used as a source of match funding.

European Social Fund investments are limited by State Aid regulations and where the award of these funds would constitute State Aid the grant rate may fall below the 50-80% maximum.

European Social Funds are paid quarterly in arrears and expenditure must be defrayed prior to the submission of any grant claims. Applicants may be asked to demonstrate how they are able to cash flow the operation. The funding for eligible staff costs can be included as match funding but only where the employing organisation is the Applicant or a delivery partner included in the funding agreement. The use of unpaid work or a valuation of staff time, as a contribution in kind will be considered as match funding on an exceptional basis.

6.4 Project timescales

European Social Fund funding will normally be approved for three years; however, the managing authority reserves the right to extend the contract term in exceptional circumstances.

Projects approved following this call will normally be expected to:

- Commence delivery (defraying European Social Fund eligible costs) within three months of formal approval. Projects which fail to meet this deadline may be deselected; and
- Be financially closed by June 2023.

6.5 Project extensions

Existing grant recipients whose projects;

1. Have a Technical Assistance funding agreement that ends/has a financial completion date during the period of this call or within **18 months of the closing date of this call:** and
2. Addresses the priorities set out in section 2

May not apply for a second phase of delivery against this Call.

6.6 Cross Cutting Themes/Horizontal Principles

All applications received as a result of this call will be required to demonstrate how the Cross Cutting Themes have been addressed in the project design and development.

Cross Cutting Themes for the European Social Fund programme are required to promote sustainable development, including the aim of preserving and improving the quality of the environment as well as the need to prepare for expected changes to the environment and climate and equal opportunities and non-discrimination. All delivery partners are required to:

- Demonstrate that their project is sustainable and has an environmental focus – to help provide some balance to the European Social Fund’s strong social and economic focus and
- Help embed ‘due regard’ to the Public Sector Equality Duty / Equality Act 2010 and meet EU structural fund regulations to promote gender equality and equal opportunities through delivery of their projects.

Further information is available in Section 11 of the [European Social Fund Operational Programme](#).

6.7 Additionality, duplication and displacement

Additionality is a core principle of European Social Fund funding. Applicants must be able to demonstrate that the activity paid for out of these funds adds value to new or existing activity.

European Social Funds cannot support activities that duplicate existing provision/services.

Applications need to identify and evidence how the beneficiaries will use the service and demonstrate that the project does not displace other activity available in the market place.

6.8 State Aid & revenue generation

Applicants are required, in the application, to provide a view on how their proposal complies with State Aid law. Applicants must ensure that projects comply with the law on State Aid. Grant funding to any economic undertaking which is State Aid can only be awarded if it is compatible aid, in that it complies with the terms of a notified scheme under the General Block Exemption Regulation (EU) 651/2014.

Only if this is not possible should Applicants use the De Minimis Regulation or “no aid”. [Guidance](#) for grant recipients explaining more about State Aid, is available; it is important that Applicants take responsibility for understanding the importance of the State Aid rules and securing their full compliance with them throughout the project, if it is selected into the programmes.

The managing authority is not able to give legal advice on State Aid. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that the operation is State Aid compliant.

6.9 Procurement

All costs delivered by the applicant (grant recipient and/or delivery partner(s)) must be recovered on an actual cost basis. Other costs must be procured in line with National (including Public Procurement Regulation 2015 - [Procurement Guidance](#)) and EU regulations.

Procurement will be subject to audit and verification and any irregularity will result in a financial penalty of up to 100% of the grant paid. Robust and transparent procurement is required to ensure that grant recipients:

- Consider value for money;
- Maximise efficient use of public money; and
- Maintain competitiveness and fairness across the European Union.

It is strongly recommended that applicants seek and follow their own legal advice in respect of procurement requirements. Procurement irregularities remain the most substantive cause of error and clawback of grants.

7 Support

Please note that this is a competitive call. Details of where guidance can be found are contained throughout this call document. In exceptional circumstances, if there are issues with accessing this guidance, please contact: ESF.2014-2020@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK

European Social Fund contacts covering Local Enterprise Partnership areas can be viewed in the [Technical Assistance Guidance](#) document.

8 Key Documents

- European Social Fund operational programmes;

- Technical Assistance Guidance;
- ESIF Full Application Guidance;
- Local Enterprise Partnership Area's European Structural and Investment Funds Strategy;
- Eligibility Guidance;
- Target Definitions.

9 Document Checklist

Incomplete applications will be rejected. Please ensure the following information (documents) are submitted.

- Fully completed Full Application
- Financial Tables
- Outputs, Results and Indicators Tables; and
- Three years financial accounts (if private or voluntary and community sector).

10 Document Submission

Completed Full Applications must be submitted via **email** to the address in Section 7.

Application forms not received by the deadline will not be assessed. Applications which are not fully completed will be excluded.

For this call applications will normally be required to **commence delivery/activity within three months** of the award of a Funding agreement.

Any changes related to the deadline for the submission of the application form will be notified on the [European Growth Funding](#) website.