

# Nordic Flagship Projects - Frequently Asked Questions

Version 1 - 22.01.2015

This document will be updated with additional information leading up to the call deadline.

## Financing

**Q:** What can be budgeted? Salaries? Travel? Research infrastructure/equipment?

**A:** Everything that is directly connected to the project activities is natural to budget for. That includes for example salary, travel, meetings, necessary infrastructure/equipment, dissemination, and overhead. Please keep in mind that any infrastructure/equipment budgeted must be central in realising the project and must contribute with significant Nordic added value. Large investments in infrastructure/equipment that do not have clear Nordic added value (where they could have been supported through national funding), will detract from the proposal's competitiveness. Note also that the proposal will be evaluated on cost effectiveness.

**Q:** The call text says that 100% of project costs are eligible for funding. Does this mean that direct costs, research facility costs and overheads are covered?

**A:** That is correct. Nordic Energy Research does not apply a fixed ceiling to hourly rates, overhead or other operating costs in this call, but instead, cost effectiveness is included in the evaluation criteria for phase 2. Please follow your own institution's guidelines and norms on this matter or other national guidelines.

**Q:** What are some examples of co-financing?

**A:** An example would be an organisation using some of its base funding, funding from another project or external funding programme, or in-kind contributions if the form of working hours to support the project.

**Q:** Which forms of co-financing are allowed (cash, in-kind, other projects)? Are there any constraints?

**A:** All types of co-funding are allowed and welcome for this call as long as it is directly relevant to the project. There is no minimum or maximum co-financing amount, but in the case where funding sought from Nordic Energy Research is either a top-up to a much larger co-financing amount, or an continuation of an existing project, there is a risk that the proposal will not score well in the Strategic Relevance criteria. If in doubt, please contact us for clarification on this.

**Q:** Is in-kind contribution required? It is included in the budget table provided in the template for the pre-proposals.

**A:** It is not required, but welcome and encouraged where relevant.

**Q:** Are we able to use our co-financing for activities that are potentially outside the scope of what funding from Nordic Energy Research covers, such as more demonstration-orientated activities?

**A:** This is allowed, but please keep in mind that projects will be evaluated on Strategic Relevance.

**Q:** What is the required level of detail of the budget in the pre-proposal?

**A:** Please fill out the budget table provided in the Project Description Template, which requires total amounts for each institution. If you wish to highlight additional details relating to your budget that you deem relevant to the proposal, please do so in the text fields of the Project Description Template.

**Q:** How does state aid limitation affect organisations under this call?

**A:** For organisations that falls outside of our definition of a research organisation, please contact people in your organisation that are involved with such issues (typically the administration, the economy department etc.).

**Q:** How does funding from large national programmes to organisations that falls under state aid regulations count towards the de minimis limit?

**A:** If you fall outside our definition of a research organisation and seek funding under this call, you will fall under de minimis rule. In general, most national funding programmes use so-called block exemptions to state aid, which does not count towards the de minimis ceiling. Questions regarding state aid is somewhat complicated and we strongly advise you to check with someone who deals with such issues within your organisation (typically the administration, economy department etc) to make sure you apply with the EU/EFTA regulations regarding this.

**Q:** Are the 'research organisation' criteria open for interpretation?

**A:** No. Please make sure that you have interpreted these criteria correctly, otherwise you risk submitting an ineligible proposal.

## Evaluation process

**Q:** How many pre-proposals will go through to the full-proposal stage?

**A:** Proposals representing 3 to 4 times the total funding available will go through to the second phase.

**Q:** Will we get detailed feedback from the pre-proposal stage and will they be made public or just communicated to the applicant?

**A:** We will not have the capacity to give detailed feedback for pre-proposals that do not qualify for the second phase. All successful applicants will be contacted directly by email and will be offered feedback. Nordic Energy Research will also publish a list of the qualified pre-proposals and its owners on the call website as soon as our board has made a decision.

**Q:** How is the selection process of the pre-proposals set up?

**A:** In phase 1 (pre-proposals), the proposals will be assessed for eligibility by the secretariat of Nordic Energy Research. Then they will be preliminarily scored in accordance with the first set of criteria (see attachment 2), and handed over to Board of Nordic Energy Research for the final evaluation. A decision will be made by the Board of Nordic Energy Research on which pre-proposals go through to the second phase.

**Q:** How is the review process for full proposals set up?

**A:** In the second phase, all full proposals will be evaluated by a panel of international experts in accordance with the second set of criteria (see attachment 2) – first individually by each expert, and then together as a panel. We will not publish the members of this group. We intend to call on additional panel members when there is a need for specific competencies in a specific scientific field. Parallel with this, the Board of Nordic Energy Research will conduct a new evaluation of the four criteria from phase 1 (Nordic added value, system perspective, political relevance, strategic relevance) together with cost effectiveness.

The experts' recommendation is then handed over to the Board of Nordic Energy Research for a final decision, based both on the experts' recommendation and the new evaluation made by the Board of Nordic Energy Research. The final decision on which projects receive funding will be made by the Board of Nordic Energy Research.

**Q:** Will I be asked to recommend suitable reviewers for the full proposal?

**A:** At the full proposal stage, we will give you the opportunity to name up to three experts within your specific thematic area that you see fit, competent and independent to review your proposal. These may be called upon as additional experts if required for a specific scientific field. You will also be asked to name up to three experts who you do not see fit/competent/independent to review your proposal. It will be up to NER to determine whether or not these experts will be utilised for the evaluation beyond the core international panel of experts who will evaluate all projects.

**Q:** in the evaluation criteria for phase 1, it says "Competence - Competence and experience of the Project Manager." What is required in terms of documentation?

**A:** If you log into the call system and set up an application, you'll see the requirements for the Project Manager's CV, including publications.

**Q:** Would a good project with a young, relatively inexperienced project manager be evaluated negatively?

**A:** Seniority, experience (both research and managing) and expertise is important for a project manager in this call. Projects will be evaluated on this criteria. See attachment 2.

**Q:** How much weight will be placed on the research idea relative to administrative detail, gender balance etc.?

**A:** At the pre-proposal stage, the emphasis will be placed on the research idea and the five first criteria listed in attachment 2.

## Scope

**Q:** Which timeframe should the work focus on- towards 2020, 30, 40 or 50?

**A:** The timeframe can be short, medium or long term, but must be able to communicate political relevance in the short term.

**Q:** When we talk about "demonstrating the Nordic added value", does it have anything to say the scale in which we plan to carry out our research (lab scale, pilot scale, demo scale)?

**A:** Any project will be judged on the ability to demonstrate Nordic added value through a system perspective where any findings are contextualized and given political relevance, regardless of the scale of the actual research conducted.

**Q:** What is the relative importance of the NER strategy and the Nordic ETP - are they equally important?

**A:** They are not equally important. The NER strategy is an attachment to the call text and the Flagship Projects are the most important instruments in realising this strategy. Proposals must be well aligned with our strategy. The Nordic ETP on the other hand can be used where relevant as an optional point of reference and a Nordic backdrop to build on, expand on or round out.

**Q:** Will it be regarded as a strength or weakness if a proposal addresses more than 1 of the 4 main technology challenges referred to in the NER strategy?

**A:** This would be a strength. We would like to point out that these four challenges are not the thematic scope of the call, and if a proposal falls outside or between these challenges while still thoroughly demonstrating Nordic Added Value, that will be seen as equally relevant.

**Q:** You say projects should be relevant to national goals. Does that mean relevant to all applicant countries?

**A:** Not necessarily: If you want to bring in competencies on a technology from an organisation from a country that does not have a political focus on that technology, it is perfectly fine.

**Q:** Systemic questions about Nordic energy systems go beyond technology. To what degree is a focus on the analysis or development of technological solutions necessary?

**A:** We advise that proposals integrate a technological angle in order to score well on the Strategic Relevance (NER strategy) and System Perspective (multidisciplinary) criteria. If you are in doubt, we would advise contacting us.

**Q:** How can we interpret “unique Nordic challenges”?

**A:** That could either be a uniquely Nordic issue (such as the Nordic electricity grid), or a clear Nordic angle on a more general issue (for example biofuels), or both. It is very important to clearly explain why the research question is best tackled from a Nordic angle.

**Q:** Where in the innovation chain is the call targeted? And at what Technology Readiness Level?

**A:** We have not specified this explicitly in the call but this is covered under the criteria for Nordic Added Value and Strategic Relevance. We believe that basic research activities are better covered by national funding instruments, and in addition most basic research activities will have difficulty being competitive in the Political Relevance criteria. To be competitive under the Nordic Added Value criteria, the proposal must argue for why the project is better supported at the Nordic level than national or European level. On the other end of the scale, we believe that the call is too small to be able to properly support demonstration projects. If the project can include elements of demonstration, while at the same time succeeding in bringing in a solid system perspective through the inclusion of broader analysis, it may be within the scope. A project where the majority of funding goes into equipment costs associated with demonstration (or testing at any other stage in the innovation chain) will likely have difficulty being competitive in the System Perspective and Political Relevance criteria. Regarding which Technology Readiness Level the call supports. We prefer not to specify this level as it is not directly applicable to the analysis of system solutions and other relevant research topics rooted in the social sciences, economics or energy system modelling for example. If considering a specific technology from a natural science perspective, our guidance would be to focus within levels 3-6 in the European Commission’s scale.

**Q:** The call text asks for “in-depth, effective and meaningful cooperation“, what does this mean?

**A:** We mean that the cooperation must go beyond basic network-building. We will have a separate, smaller call later in 2015 on network building. The Nordic Flagship Projects call should foster deeper, result-orientated cooperation between the partners.

**Q:** Can the projects include education activities? Can part of the budget be allocated to such activity?

**A:** We would consider this outside the scope of the call. We will have a call for Network Building Projects later in 2015 where such activities would be better suited.

## Partners

**Q:** How is NER’s view on continuations of existing consortia, involvement of partners from "old" networks - NER projects?

**A:** That is fine and can be considered a strength as long as it is relevant and fit for purpose, yielding added analytical and Nordic value.

**Q:** Will there be a partner search?

**A:** No. We hope that the consortia will be idea-driven and that applicants look for partners based on the research ideas and analytical angles and seek out partners to strengthen the project. We will publish a list of participants to the information meeting.

**Q:** Will there be a participant list of the people participating in this seminar?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** We must have 3 partners from at least 3 Nordic countries: Do universities and industries count equal as partners? In other words, can a consortium consist of two universities from two different countries plus an industry from a third country?

**A:** Yes, all partners count from the 5 Nordic countries.

**Q:** Can more than one institution per country participate?

**A:** Yes

**Q:** Is there a set limit as to how many proposals I or my institution can participate in?

**A:** There is no set limit as to how many proposals you can participate in, either as a project manager or a participant.

**Q:** Can a project be led by a researcher and institution not based in the natural sciences.

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** Partners outside the Nordic+Baltic+North-West Russian region cannot receive direct funding, is it possible to subcontract minor amounts to receive research input from outside the region?

**A:** No it is not possible to subcontract, but it is allowed to pay compensation and travel costs associated with foreign participation in workshops or conferences.

**Q:** Is it possible to add or remove partners between the pre-proposal and phase II proposal?

**A:** Yes. You may want to do this based on the feedback you receive from us if you qualify for the second stage.

**Q:** Do Greenland, the Faroe Islands and the Åland Islands count towards the minimum of “three Nordic countries” in this call? Would for instance a consortium made up of institutions from Denmark, the Faroe Islands and Sweden be eligible?

**A:** First of all, partners from these autonomous regions are eligible for funding under this call. However, when counting towards the three country minimum, we will count Greenland and the Faroe Islands as Denmark, and the Åland Islands as Finland. That means a consortium made up of Denmark, the Faroe Islands and Sweden would not be eligible. A consortium made up of institutions from the Faroe Islands, Sweden and the Åland Islands on the other hand would be eligible.

Q: Can post- docs be hired, only PhDs are mentioned in the call text?

A: Post-docs are welcome as long as they are relevant and become an integrated part of the project.

Q: Are there rules for number of years and annual funding for PhD students, or is this handled on a national level?

A: We advise you to follow national norms and guidelines and your own institutions practice if you are incorporating PhD's in the project.

Q: Can I apply for an individual PhD/Post-doc under this call?

A: Unfortunately as a single researcher, you are not eligible for funding under this call, it must be through an institution's participation in a project.