



Guidance Notes for Applications for the LIFE Project Co-Financing Scheme

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1. Introduction

The LIFE Project Co-Financing Scheme is offered by the Ministry for the Environment, Energy and Enterprise (hereinafter referred to as “MEEE”) to increase participation in LIFE projects by voluntary organisations. MEEE understands the challenge faced by voluntary organisations with regard to capacities to applying and co-financing their project proposal under the LIFE Programme. Hence, through this Scheme, MEEE is offering to provide a grant of up to €150,000 towards the co-financing of a project proposal that is submitted from the LIFE Programme calls published on May 17, 2022.

1.1. Objective of this Scheme

This Scheme is to assist voluntary organisations in the implementation of awarded projects under the LIFE Programme (2021-2027). The aim of this Scheme is to support voluntary organisations which, although capable of coordinating an EU funded project, may lack the means to cover their contribution of the budget and financing.

Priority shall be given to project proposals which cover the priority areas below:

- Measures and Management of Natura 2000 Sites;
- Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation;
- Green Infrastructure;
- Energy Efficiency;
- Renewable Energy;
- Waste Management and/or Marine Litter; and/or
- Afforestation.

1.2 LIFE National Contact Point

Any questions or clarifications regarding this Scheme are to be addressed to the:

LIFE National Contact Point
Ministry for the Environment, Energy and Enterprise
6, Qormi Road, Santa Venera

Ms Rachella Muscat
Email: life.meee@gov.mt
Tel: 2331 6232

1.3 Definitions

In this Scheme, unless the context otherwise requires, the term:

“Applicant” means any voluntary organisation eligible to apply in terms of these Guidelines and which consequently applies for funding under this Scheme;

“Letter of Acceptance” means refers to a document outlining the understanding between MEEE and a voluntary organisation which provides the basis for future legally binding agreements (in this case, an official letter of approval).

2. Eligibility for Participation

2.1 Applicant Eligibility

This Scheme is offered to voluntary organisations, as a single legal entity, that fulfil the below requirements:

- Applicants must be an established non-Government, non-profit voluntary organisation in the Maltese territory; and
- Applicants must be duly enrolled with the Commissioner for Voluntary Organisations and must be compliant with the provisions of the Voluntary Organisations Act (Cap 492 of the Laws of Malta) and its subsidiary legislation.
- Applicants must also be the Coordinating Beneficiaries in subsequent submitted proposals under the LIFE Programme.

The above provisions are applicable to Applicants both at the date of deadline and until such time when funding is due to be granted.

2.2 Application Eligibility

An application shall be considered eligible for funding under this Scheme if:

- the duly filled in application form is successfully submitted through the online submission platform and within the established deadline;
- the submitted application form is complete and includes all relevant supporting documentation;
- the submitted application form is coordinated by an eligible voluntary organisation that satisfies the eligibility criteria of Clause 2;
- Applicants requesting assistance under this Scheme are the Coordinating Beneficiary in the proposal;
- the Applicant submits evidence of financial capacity to indicate financial stability. Evidence of financial capacity shall include:
 - (i) a declaration by a warranted accountant/lawyer attesting that funds are available to match the required private financing;
 - (ii) profit and loss statements of the previous year;
 - (iii) audited financial statements or management accounts, if the audited accounts are not available of the previous two (2) years;
 - (iv) in case of new voluntary organisations operating in the first year of business, existing management accounts; cash flow and revenue projections are to be submitted for the next year. These are to be certified by a certified public accountant.

2.3 Exclusion Criteria

An application shall not be considered under this Scheme if:

- any of the eligible/applicant criteria are not met;
- the Applicant is bankrupt, subject to insolvency or winding-up procedures; its assets are being administered by a liquidator or by a court; it is in an arrangement with creditors; its business activities are suspended, or it is in any analogous situation arising from a similar procedure provided for under EU or national laws or regulations;
- it has been established by a final judgement or a final administrative decision that the Applicant is in breach of its obligations relating to the payment of taxes or social security contributions in accordance with the applicable law;
- it has been established by a final judgement or a final administrative decision that the Applicant is guilty of grave professional misconduct by having violated applicable laws or regulations or ethical standards of the profession to which the applicant belongs, or by having engaged in any wrongful intent or gross negligence, including, in particular:

- (i) fraudulently or negligently misrepresenting information required for the verification of the absence of grounds for exclusion or the fulfilment of eligibility or selection criteria or in the performance of a contract, a grant agreement or a grant decision;
 - (ii) entering into agreement with other applicants with the aim of distorting competition;
 - (iii) violating intellectual property rights;
 - (iv) attempting to influence the decision-making process of the MEEE during the award procedure;
 - (v) attempting to obtain confidential information that may confer upon its undue advantages in the award procedure.
- it has been established by a final judgement that the Applicant is guilty of fraud, corruption, conduct related to criminal organisation, money laundering or terrorism financing, terrorist offences or offences linked to terrorism activities, child labour or other offences concerning trafficking in human beings.
 - the Applicant has shown significant deficiencies in complying with main obligations in the performance of a contract, a grant agreement or a grant decision financed by the Union's budget, which has led to its early termination or to the application of liquidated damages or other contractual penalties, or which has been discovered following checks, audits or investigations by an authorising officer, OLAF or the Court of Auditors.

3. Application Process

Applicants are to submit an e-application form, as explained below. Prospective applicants are to note that only soft copies submitted via the online portal will be accepted. Applications in hard copy, whether submitted by mail, by hand or by any other means will not be accepted. Likewise, applications via pen-drive, cd or other digital storage means will not be accepted.

All relevant information and documentation will need to be submitted with the application form for the form to be considered for further processing. It is the responsibility of the Applicant to ensure that all requested information and documents are duly provided.

Only one (1) online application for each project proposal shall be submitted by the voluntary organisation. However a voluntary organisation can submit applications for different project proposals.

Should it be necessary, the Ministry for the Environment, Energy and Enterprise reserves the right to request additional information not included in these Guidance Notes from the Applicant where it is justified for the aims of implementing this Scheme in compliance with applicable laws and regulations.

Further details on the application process may be published on the website www.environment.gov.mt.

Step One: Access the Website:

- ✓ For the online application, access the webpage link: <https://environment.gov.mt/en/life/Pages/life2021-2027.aspx>
- ✓ If not yet registered, Applicants must first register with the VO Funding Portal, before proceeding to step 2.
- ✓ Search for the LIFE Co-Financing Scheme call
- ✓ Read the related guidelines which will assist in the filling and submission of the relevant application form.

Step Two: Fill Out the Online Form, which includes:

- ✓ Applicant details and VO registration number
- ✓ Description of the voluntary organisation
- ✓ Selection of national priorities areas covered by the project proposal
- ✓ Selection of LIFE priority project topic/s covered in the project proposal
- ✓ Summary of the project proposal and its impacts

- ✓ Experience in EU funded projects

Step Three: Submit the Application

- ✓ Click the link to upload the necessary documents:
 1. VO Certification
 2. Draft of the LIFE Project proposal
 3. Audited financial statements, or Management accounts if the audited accounts are not available, of the years 2020, 2021 and up to application date
 4. In the case where a voluntary organisation is in its first year of business, existing Management accounts at application date, cash flow and revenue projections for next year certified by a certified public accountant
 5. Profit and Loss statements of the previous year
 6. Declaration by a warranted accountant/ lawyer attesting that funds are available to match the private financing
 7. Previous LIFE evaluation synthesis report (if applicable).

3.1 Deadline for Submissions

The online application shall open on the **17th May 2022** and shall close on the **1st August 2022**.

Any submissions received after the deadline shall not be considered.

Applicants under this Scheme must keep in mind that any work undertaken before the Letter of Acceptance signed by the Ministry for the Environment, Energy and Enterprise shall not signify a commitment on behalf of the MEEE in terms of this Scheme.

Prospective applicants are strongly advised to avoid submitting applications on the last days of the Scheme to maximise the timeframe that the Applicant has to ensure that the project idea is submitted to the European Commission's LIFE programme on time.

3.2 Budget

The total maximum budget available for the running of this Scheme is €150,000.

4. Eligible Cost

This Scheme offers a grant towards the co-financing requirement with a successful application to the LIFE programme. This grant will only be considered if the LIFE full Project Proposal is successful in the European Union. As such, the eligible expenditures are those which are considered eligible in the project Grant Agreement. MEEE does not offer other funds for other activities except the contribution to the co-financing which makes up the total project budget.

The successful Applicants to the Scheme shall be responsible for adhering to the criteria for eligible expenditure as stated in the LIFE guidelines for applicants, the specific LIFE Call that they are applying for and the terms and conditions of the applicable Grant Agreement.

Parties which are supported by this Scheme are expected to adhere to public procurement rules for fairness. Applicants are strongly encouraged to comply with green public procurement criteria, to the extent possible. Parties which are supported by the Scheme must adhere to general accounting and reporting principles as stated in the LIFE guidelines for applicants and the Grant Agreement.

Expenditure is considered eligible after the project has been approved by the Commission and the Grant Agreement is signed.

To avoid the risk of double funding, the Applicant must indicate in the relevant section of the application form, the sources and the amounts of any other funding received or even applied for the same project.

5. Selection Process

5.1 Selection Criteria

The appraisal of applications submitted shall be undertaken by a Project Selection Committee appointed for the purpose by MEEE. Applications shall be judged on their adherence to the criteria and the marking scheme indicated hereunder:

Criteria	Score
General Selection Criteria (1st Stage)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevance of the Project Proposal to the Priorities of the Scheme <p><i>- Extent to which the project meets the objectives, parameters, requirements and criteria and addresses at least one of the priority areas</i></p> <p><i>- Demonstrates needs, feasibility, effectiveness, reliability and sustainability of the project proposal in meeting and addressing environmental needs and providing tangible environmental benefits</i></p>	30
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of the Proposal <p><i>- Clarity of focus on achieving the declared outcomes in the most effective way</i></p> <p><i>- Soundness of budget and value for money, securing net long-term benefit</i></p> <p><i>- Compatibility of any site-specific interventions with their environmental context</i></p> <p><i>- Comprehensive and logical project management concepts as outlined in the documentation provided</i></p>	10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity of Applicant Organisation to Carry Out Project Proposal <p><i>- Sufficiency of resources of the organisation to carry out the proposed project</i></p> <p><i>- Demonstrated ability, competence and experience and capacity of the organisation to successfully and lawfully implement the project in a timely and effective manner</i></p> <p><i>- The organisation's track record to meet appropriate environmental standards</i></p>	10
Total (1st stage)	50
Measures Specific Criteria (2nd stage)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How the proposed Project addresses a specific MEEE Priority Area <p><i>- See section 1.1 for the list of the MEEE priority areas</i></p>	25
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inherence to the Goals and Aims of the LIFE calls <p><i>- Including its impact and value against one of more of the following LIFE measures:</i></p> <p><i>(i) Nature and Biodiversity</i></p> <p><i>(ii) Circular Economy and Quality of LIFE</i></p> <p><i>(iii) Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation and/or</i></p> <p><i>(iv) Clean Energy Transition</i></p>	50
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainability of the Expected Impact of the Project 	25
Total (2nd stage)	100

Applicants must first pass a total score of 35 marks for the General Selection Criteria to be considered for the Co-Financing Scheme and to proceed to the 2nd Stage of evaluation. Applications which pass the 1st

Stage (General Selection Criteria) will then be evaluated against the terms of the calls and the aims of the measure specific criteria of the area of LIFE.

In stage 2, the applications will be scored out of 100 and Applicants need 70 or higher to proceed. The proposal project idea will be judged against the aims, criteria and objectives of the specific LIFE measures the proposal will be submitted for and in adherence to the specific LIFE call.

Allocation of grants will be based on the final mark and ranking obtained and budget available. A Letter of Acceptance by MEEE that the co-financing element will be provided will be duly signed and submitted to the selected applicant Voluntary Organisation. Those project proposals which are not successful in obtaining the co-financing due to lack of funds, but which form part of the final ranking, will be placed on a reserve list. This will be done so that should the EU Commission not select the top ranked project proposal, but select one of those in the reserve list, then the co-financing element can be granted to them.

5.2 Outcome of the Selection Process

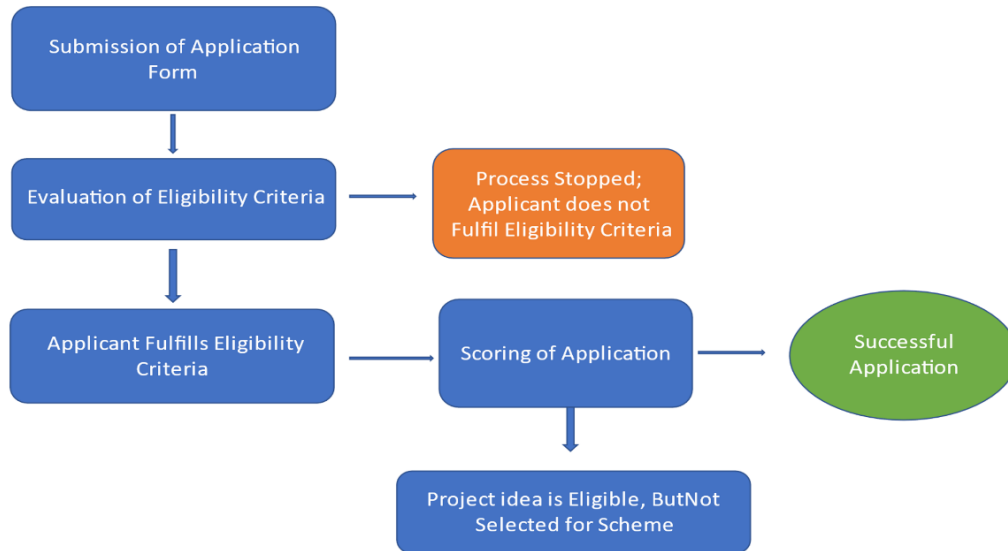
The Scheme will operate according to a systematic process from the submission to the outcome of the application.

The NCP at MEEE shall be responsible for the timely notification of Applicants of the outcome of their application.

In case the application is successful the NCP shall provide the successful voluntary organisation with the decision of acceptance of the project proposal for co-financing. The Letter of Acceptance will refer to the full legal name of the organisation, the key contact and the name of the selected proposal proposal that will be co-financed by MEEE and may include conditions made by the Project Selection Committee. The period of eligible expenses begins on the date of the Letter of Acceptance. A scanned copy of the Letter of Acceptance shall be provided to the voluntary organisation by email.

In the case that the application is unsuccessful, the NCP shall provide the overall scores given by the Project Selection Committee. Unsuccessful applicants may appeal the decision within five (5) days of the result by sending an appeal in writing, outlining the area of contention, to life.meee@gov.mt.

Any appeal will be reviewed by an Appeals Committee made up of officials who were not involved in the project selection process. The appeal shall be decided, within ten (10) days, after a review of the complaint. The NCP shall be informed whether the original decision will be reversed or upheld. The decision on the appeal shall be final.



6. Contractual Obligations

Upon signing the Grant Agreement, the Beneficiary voluntary organisation becomes legally bound by certain provisions. The following sections provide information on some aspects of the contractual obligations of the Beneficiary.

6.1 Funding Agreement

Successful Applicants shall enter into a Funding Agreement with the MEEE. The Funding Agreement shall be subject to the conditions set out in these guidelines as well as those contained in the call for applications and shall also include any specific conditions and arrangements as necessary to ensure proper governance and enforcement of the grant conditions as well as effective implementation, achievement and durability of environmental benefits.

In accepting funding from the Scheme, a Beneficiary is expected to:

- ensure that the project commences promptly and progresses according to the established timelines and budget;
- submit performance reports to the satisfaction of the MEEE;
- provide due acknowledgement to MEEE, as co-financier, in all publications and reports, all informative signage and all public communications relating to the approved project; and
- ensure that all funds are used in line with the grant conditions.

6.2 Public Procurement

Beneficiaries of this Scheme are to be aware that they are bound by the principles of good governance, sound financial management and relevant EU or National Legislation.

Checks in relation to public procurement will verify that Union public procurement rules and related national rules are complied with and that the basic principles of transparency, objectivity, non-discrimination and appropriate disclosure have been respected throughout the entire process.

The documents to be submitted with each payment claim by beneficiaries shall be comprehensive enough to enable verification of the legality and regularity of the expenditure in compliance with national and Union rules. Administrative checks shall thereby comprise, as far as possible, a complete review of the supporting documents to each payment claim.

When submitting a request for payment of suppliers and/or contractors, it is crucial that all necessary documentation is presented and that the payment claims/invoices submitted are clear and valid as per the twelfth schedule of the Value-Added Tax Act (Cap 406 of the Laws of Malta), which stipulates what a tax invoice should include.

In general, a tax invoice should contain the following particulars:

1. the date of issue;
2. a sequential number which uniquely identifies the invoice;
3. the name, address and VAT number of the supplier;
4. the name, address and VAT number of the customer;
5. a description sufficient to identify the quantity and nature of the goods or the extent and nature of the goods or the extent and nature of the services applied;
6. the date on which the supply was made or complete or the date on which a payment on account of a supplier was made;
7. the taxable value per rate or exemption, the unit price exclusive of tax and any discounts or rebates if they are not included in the unit price;
8. the amount of tax chargeable, if any, at each rate so chargeable;
9. the total amount of tax chargeable, if any.

MEEE retains the right to reject any payment claim if this is not of sufficient quality or does not contain all the relevant details.

6.3 Payments

Where applicable, the Beneficiary voluntary organisation may opt to request an interim payment. These payments will be carried out in lots. In total, these lots cannot exceed 50% of the total eligible grant amount and shall be paid upon presentation of relative invoices and eligible proof of payment.

The Applicant may only claim back expenditure that is incurred from the date of submission of the application. The Beneficiary may submit a request for reimbursement once all project components have been completed and payments settled in full upon certified completion of the project.

In cases where a project consists of structural works, the Beneficiary has to present an actual bill of quantities, as well as a declaration of completed works endorsed by a warranted architect related to the cost components contracted. Moreover, the Beneficiary also has to submit drawings highlighted by the architect to reveal which sections of the holding are being affected by the grant reimbursement.

The beneficiary shall, within one (1) month following project completion, submit to the MEEE a final Progress Report and a completion certificate, also including documentary evidence and photographs to confirm that all project components have been successfully implemented to the required standards.

If the Beneficiary does not meet all requirements set out in the Grant Agreement or is found to have defaulted on the conditions of the grant, MEEE may decide to recover the entire co-financing, or any proportionate amount, at its sole discretion. The Beneficiary shall repay any such amount within thirty (30) days from being intimated by MEEE. Monies due shall be deemed to constitute public debt and the applicable measures may be taken or enforced to recover such debt.

MEEE reserves the right to rescind any funding agreement at any time if any of the conditions set out therein are not properly observed. Furthermore, if at any point it results that an application, or any terms of agreement (or the inclusion or omission of any such terms), were vitiated or influenced by incorrect, misleading or fraudulent information or assurance, or by a breach of rules or regulations, MEEE shall have the right to revoke the agreement or parts thereof, or to amend its terms, as it deems appropriate, as well as to recover any funds or seek any other appropriate redress. MEEE shall not be liable for any ensuing

damage or inconvenience suffered by the Beneficiary or third parties. MEEE shall also have the right to take further action in the event of fraud or other malicious circumstances.

7. State Aid

The grant is applicable to eligible applicants that do not carry out an economic activity within the meaning of Article 107 TFEU. The successful project under the EU LIFE Programme should also not give rise to an economic activity.

In the case where the eligible applicant carries out an economic activity within the meaning of Article 107 TFEU and/or the successful project would give rise to an economic activity, the grant will be awarded in line with State aid rules.

8. Auditing and Monitoring

8.1 Monitoring

The Committee may conduct monitoring measures whereby Beneficiaries are asked to present the necessary documentation for auditing purposes. In applying for support under this Grant the beneficiary is deemed automatically as agreeing to cooperate with or take part in such audits, which are important for reviewing the effectiveness of the measure as well as evidencing implementation of projects.

MEEE shall have the right to review any documentation pertaining to the beneficiary organisation in relation to the grant obtained and to take any action as it considers appropriate if the relevant procedures and safeguards are not observed.

8.2. Auditing

Beneficiaries may be required to provide proof that the grant has been used correctly and in accordance with the provisions of this Scheme.

Beneficiaries must also retain all documentation pertaining to the funded project, as well as original fiscal invoices and receipts, for a period of up to two (2) years following the submission of the accounts in which the final expenditure of the completed project is included and submit them when and as requested.

If it is shown that an application, or any terms of agreement (or the inclusion or omission of any such terms), were vitiated or influenced by incorrect, misleading or fraudulent information or assurance, or by a breach of rules or regulations, MEEE shall have the right to revoke the scheme agreement or parts thereof, or to amend its terms, as it deems appropriate, as well as to recover any funds or seek any other appropriate redress. MEEE shall not be liable for any ensuing damage or inconvenience suffered by the beneficiary or third party. MEEE shall also have the right to take further action in the event of fraud or other malicious circumstance.

9. Interpretation

This document endeavours to establish comprehensive and unambiguous rules governing participation in this initiative. However, should circumstances arise where the provisions herein are inadequate, unclear, ambiguous, or conflicting, MEEE shall exercise its discretion in the interpretation of the rules through the setting up of an ad hoc committee.

10. Confidentiality of Submissions

Unless otherwise indicated, all application submissions shall be treated in strict confidence. The data collected via the application for the grant and its subsequent processing to evaluate data subject's request for funding under the Scheme is in line with the Data Protection Act, Chapter 586 of the Laws of Malta and Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data and repealing Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation). All personal data contained in the application form shall be processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act as per local legislation without prejudice to the possibility of transferring such data to the responsible bodies for inspection and audit.

Whilst abiding to the provisions set in the Data Protection Act regarding the handling of personal data, MEEE retains the right to disclose, exchange or request information about any Applicant, application and agreement to or with other organisations or consultants which MEEE considers appropriate for administration, statistical, monitoring, evaluation and dissemination purposes.