

European Commission



Guidance notes

Thematic Networks

Periodic call for proposals

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COMPETITIVE AND SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

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Major revisions – history :

Date	Chapter / revision
26/7/2000	1.2 : Funding/own contribution clarified 1.5 : Required contractual information (incl. CPFs), cost and funding rules detailed 2.4 : New WP 3 and other highlights relating to the European Research Area

"Guidance notes on Thematic Networks"

This guidance note concerns only the Thematic Networks of the Programme "Competitive and Sustainable Growth" (hereafter referred to as "Growth Programme") implemented through a periodic call for proposals.

The document gives an overview of, and clarifies the existing information on Thematic Networks, as provided in the "GROWTH Information Package", notably the "GROWTH Workprogramme", the "Guide for Proposers Part 2/Periodic calls" and the "Proposal Submission Forms for Thematic Networks and Concerted Actions" (which include guidance on how to complete Part B / the technical description).

1. GENERAL INFORMATION ON THEMATIC NETWORKS

1.1 Participation

Thematic Networks bring together industry, universities, research centres, users, research infrastructures, technology transfer centres, science and technology expert centres, (electronic) communication experts and other relevant stakeholders around a common S&T objective relating to the priorities of the GROWTH programme.

1.2 Funding

Thematic Networks do not provide funding for actual RTD activities, but may include costs for such activities as establishing the actual state-of-the-art, identifying future research needs, comparison and establishing of best practice, benchmarking, socio-economic studies etc. They can fund not only activities related to the networking of organisations and RTD projects and co-ordination of activities, but also exchange and dissemination of knowledge stemming from the RTD activities. Funding can be up to 100% of eligible costs.

The funding percentage will be determined in relation to the own contributions of participants, and is normally expected to be less than the 100%, also reflecting the degree at which participants value their participation and the potential benefits to their research and business activities.

A funding request of less than 100% will in practice be reflected by partners using less than their normal labour rates¹, and/or fixing a funding rate less than 100% in the contract.

Payments are made on an annual basis with an advance paid after the signature of the contract. Distribution of the advance is however not recommended to be made to participants with a minor budget, in order to simplify the future administration.

1.3 Implementation activities

Thematic Networks may, according to the Workprogramme, be developed as follows:

- a) to **co-ordinate** a group ("*cluster*") of projects funded at Community, National or private level. This may include relevant projects from more than one Key Action and from other EU programmes as well as activities funded at National level or in other European frameworks. Participation is on a voluntary basis.

¹ A daily labour rate of EUR 400-450, incl. 20% overheads, is normally used to establish a budget for the funded part of the network scope.

- b) to carry out activities addressing the objectives set out in the section "**Support for Research Infrastructures**", which is implemented through a 2-stage process (Expressions of Interest and dedicated calls). Please refer to separate Guidance Note on dedicated calls.
- c) to establish and develop **networking activities** other than those defined above, which can contribute significantly to achieving the objectives of the Key Actions and Generic Technologies.

It should be noted that with these options the Thematic Network modality offers wide ranging possibilities for networking activities, spanning from supporting RTD conception and execution through to supporting the resulting technology implementation, transfer and commercialisation. They can involve a blend of projects together with individual legal entities performing activities, funded or not funded, which are calling for co-ordinated, joint efforts.

1.4 Requirements

Thematic Network proposals should have at least one principal contractor and 2 other partners from at least 2 member states. Proposed actions must however, to be considered for funding, have a clear European dimension and well-defined and significant contribution to the relevant objective or activity of the Programme and be of interest to a wider group of organisations than the participants alone.

Thematic Network proposals submitted **in response to periodic calls** are not restricted to the priorities published in the call, and may therefore address any research objective specified in the Work Programme (except *Support for Research Infrastructure*, in which case proposals can only be submitted in response to a dedicated call). In the case of Key Action 1 they should normally address the *Targeted Research Action* objectives.

It is important that a network proposal justifies that it covers a real need and added value, in an area of scientific, technical, social and economic importance, where optimised co-ordination efforts are presently required.

1.5 Specific contractual aspects

A short summary of the contractual regulations follows. However please refer to the specific Thematic Network Model Contract which can be found on the website www.cordis.lu/fp5/mod-cond.htm.

Participants. A network consortium may be established around a single **principal contractor**, or by a consortium of principal contractors, one being the co-ordinator, together with a body of **members**. Members are linked to each their principal contractor by a **membership agreement**, and the principle contractor(s) must submit a list of his members (Art. 5(c) of Annex II).

Contract Preparation Forms. The **co-ordinator** must fills CPF forms A0, A1, A2, A3, A4, A5 and Annex 2. Further **principal contractors** each fills form A5. **Members** must complete form A6.

Eligible costs cover personnel, travel and subsistence, subcontracting, consumables, computing and overheads. Costs for durable equipment, consumables and protection of knowledge are not eligible.

The funding scheme is up to 100% of the costs incurred (Guide for Proposers, part 1 page 26) with up to 20% overhead excl. subcontractor costs (Art. 19 of Annex II). The calculation scheme is additional cost, but contrary to RTD contract are permanent staff not excluded (Art. 18 of Annex II). Please also refer to chapter 1.2.

2. THE TECHNICAL CONTENT OF A THEMATIC NETWORK

Detailed instructions on how to write the “Technical Description of the Network” (Part B of the proposal) are given in the “Proposal Submission Forms for Thematic Networks and Concerted Actions” of the “GROWTH Information Package”. In the following some additional advice is provided, but it is strongly recommended to read this in conjunction with the said part of the Information Package.

The proposal should cover the following aspects:

2.1 Justification for the proposed activity

Proposers are required to explain the objectives of the RTD networking activity proposed and how this may clearly contribute to achieving the objectives of the Key Actions and Generic Technologies. This includes:

- emphasise the **common scientific, technological and other objectives** of the network in a quantified, measurable and verifiable form.

Examples may be: - to improve the RTD and demonstration coherence and technology transfer potential within a particular scientific / technological field – to establish an RTD service to EU-wide industrial sectors - to coordinate a number of related RTD or demonstration activities – to assess the importance and maturity of the technologies being developed in the activities being coordinated in the network, and to map (and facilitate access to) all European centres of competence within the given network area etc.

- identify the **expected achievements**, and the **added (innovative) value** of the RTD network, again in a quantified, measurable and verifiable form.

The real need for, and the expected added value of, the networking activity must be made clear.

- explain the **international state-of-the-art**, and the limitations of existing activities.

Describe how the proposed network will advance on the monitoring and reporting of the state-of-the-art, at National and at international level, in the targeted areas (European Research Areas) of the network RTD, demonstration or other activities. Present also the limitations of any existing networking activities which may be overcome by the proposed network. Include comparisons as applicable with the International networking/coordination situation (US, Japan and elsewhere).

- define the proposed **approach(es)** for the coordination work.

The proposed coordination strategy might consider, if possible in an integrated manner, research activities, mapping the relevant European research organisations, benchmarking activities, identification of best practice, Standardisation activities, organisation of technology transfer and demonstration (validation) activities, dissemination etc.

Electronic networking concepts are encouraged for efficient coordination, communication and dissemination, and the state-of-the art and the selected methods and tools for e-networking should be carefully explained.

- where appropriate, give a *critical* appraisal of the **problem areas** (level of **risk**) involved in the successful creation and operation of the network, together with the methods for managing such risks, including corresponding contingency plans.

2.2 Information about the participants and the RTD activities to be networked

It is of fundamental importance for a successful networking activity that participants, their ongoing RTD activities or corresponding needs as users of the technologies being developed, are clearly described. Further should their intentions to contributing to the networking, to the mutual benefit of all, be described. The information requested on the participants and their activities should, with this in mind, include the following:

- ❑ an **overview of the consortium**.
- ❑ an **overview of their projects** and/or activities to be co-ordinated by the network.
- ❑ the **participant organisation** responsible for the interface between the network and a group of members of e.g. an RTD-project, a user-group, an industry- or research-association etc.
- ❑ a brief **description of each participant organisation**, including a description of the **business strategy or other mission** of the organisation, to demonstrate the logical link between this strategy and the **participation / role in the network** (both for RTD and for exploitation) and their intentions to enter into a networking activity.
- ❑ a brief summary of the relevant (**RTD and networking**) **facilities** and the **qualifications of the**, by each organisation, nominated **key person(s)** with respect to relevant networking activities .

2.3 Network management aspects

The network management should ensure a central management and control over all essential activities, ranging from the administration of the contract, the planning, organisation and follow-up of the networking activities, and the associated reporting, probably assisted by an identified group of Work Package and Task Leaders .

The proposal should:

- ❑ demonstrate the **management capability of the co-ordinating organisation** and define its role as responsible for the day-to-day management of the network
- ❑ describe the **network organisation structure**, including the organisation of a **Steering Committee**
- ❑ identify the proposed **decision mechanisms and procedures** required.

The network should consider including a mechanism to enable it to adapt to changing requirements, including a continuous adjustment of its scope and participants according to the evolution of the network and the RTD and industry environment it is serving (EC contract amendments should only be done on an annual basis).

Also the decision mechanisms relative to the coordination of clusters of projects must be defined, especially where interactions between RTD activities of the projects are required.

The network management task will further include:

- **communication flows and methods** of the network. Define, as appropriate, the plans for meetings, newsletters and reports, web-sites or efficient electronic communication systems, foreseen to facilitate the communication between the Co-ordinator and the other participants, the Work Package and Task Leaders, Steering Committee, other Stakeholders and external interested parties, and the European Commission
- **co-ordination mechanisms** that are relevant for the topic of the RTD network.
- methods for **network progress control and planning** (progress reports, working group reports, milestone reports, meetings, etc.), including an **overview table of the deliverables and milestones**, a **mid-term assessment milestone clause** with quantified **decision criteria**, the **follow-up of partners' activities**, etc.

It is important for the future follow-up of the activity level of the network that the contributions of each individual partner is clearly defined. The monitoring and reporting procedures foreseen should include a detailed review of the actual contribution of each partner, not only in terms of meeting participation but also contribution to the RTD and other networking activities defined in the Workprogramme.

Budget details should be defined on an activity-, partner- (type) and annual basis.

This should correspond to the ½-annual reporting requirements and provide arguments for any future revisions in membership or activities.

2.4 Proposed Workpackages and Tasks

The number and organisation of the workpackages depends on the size and scope of the network. Large Workpackages can be sub-divided in **Tasks**. Workpackage **Leaders should be appointed** to co-ordinate the Workpackages. Similarly, **Task Leaders** may co-ordinate the Task Groups.

Examples of possible workpackage topics are:

1. Workpackage “**Network management**”. It provides the basic infrastructure needed to operate the network. It includes the activities of the **Steering Committee**, the **network secretariat** (members administration, contracts administration, compilation of progress reports, cost statements, organisation of main meetings, etc.), the setting up and maintenance of the **web-site** and (**electronic**) **communications infrastructure** of the network (example of “E-science”).

The network management role, including their responsibility for the planned level of activities at Workpackage and Task level and support to the Workpackage and Task managers, should be explained. The communication infrastructure should support both network administration and management activities and the co-ordination of research and other activities (ref. WP 4).

2. Workpackage “**Strategy and Plans**” in order to jointly assess and report on the international state-of-the-art, to identify gaps in the RTD and demonstration or transfer activities, to define and update the joint strategy to be followed in order to reach the network objectives. This may include initiating new activities, studies, etc.

Conclusions from this Workpackage should also provide the network participants, the research community in general and the EC with useful arguments in justification of future research needs and further implementation of the European Research Area.

3. Workpackage “**Mapping of Competencies**” should be an activity which results in a complete overview of all relevant organisations of importance for RTD and technology uptake in the actual **European research area**. This should include not only the mapping of competencies of the network participants but the RTD community in general. In addition to facilitating the awareness and access to these this may also lead to adjusting the network partnership and establishing benchmarking activities.
4. Workpackage(s) for the main “**Coordination of the RTD and other activities**” and interactions between the participants. This is the core networking activity and may include 1) management of **working groups** to guide executive tasks as defined, 2) **proactive work**, where awareness actions are undertaken to reach the targeted companies and institutes to participate in new projects, and 3) **monitoring activities**, where the assessment of the participating projects’ performance and the establishment of best practice to be disseminated could take place.

The activities to be defined under this WP are encouraged to involve the active use of state-of-the-art ICT techniques for efficient coordination and collaboration. The necessary communication and information infrastructure is normally defined and maintained under WP1.

5. Workpackage “**Socio-Economic aspects, EU Policies**” may address matters such as socio-economic research and assessment activities relevant to the objectives of the network. This may also include aspects of integration of the new and future member-states, as well as the objective to improve public awareness of RTD work and results.
6. Workpackage “**Training & Education**” to initiate and co-ordinate training and education related activities relevant to the activities of the participants, the other project partners and third parties. This activity will hereby support the general policy of promoting the mobility of researchers, as hereby also the objective to reinforce the European Research Area.
7. Workpackage “**Standardisation**” to interface on behalf of the Members to Standardisation Committees. This may also include definition of best practice, benchmarking and alike.
8. Workpackage “**Network Dissemination and RTD exploitation and IPR**”. This workpackage should establish dissemination material, identify targeted audiences and undertake dissemination activities. It could help to define coordinated exploitation plans in order to improve the dissemination and exploitation of the RTD and network results. It may also address questions related to the Intellectual Property Rights.

Dissemination should attempt to be more substantial than (electronic) mailshots, and could include links with established journals, sector organisation etc.

Exploitation should also address the future of the network itself, including its possibilities for continuing after the end of the EC funding applied for. Future commercially interesting activities should be identified and plans provided for how these may be implemented.

Possibilities and methods for involving entities such as associations of research organisations, technology transfer centres or science and technology expert centres, hereby promoting the technology demonstration and transfer aspects, could also be addressed.

3. SUPPORT FOR PROPOSERS

It is recommended that proposers intending to prepare a proposal for a networking activity make contact to the appropriate Commission services, in order to ensure proper considerations are taken concerning any relevant RTD and networking activities, already funded under the Framework Programmes.

3.1 Programme Information desk – for further help

The address of the GROWTH Programme Infodesk is:

E-mail: growth@cec.eu.int
Phone: +32 2 295 23 45
Fax: +32 2 295 80 72
Web-site: <http://www.cordis.lu/growth>

The desk is manned 09h00 – 17h00 (Brussels), Monday to Friday.

Proposers may obtain further information from the following CORDIS web-pages.

3.2 Useful Web-addresses

Growth Programme Home Page , which contains the following proposers relevant information :	http://www.cordis.lu/growth/
a) Growth Guided Tour	http://www.cordis.lu/growth/src/tour.htm
b) Growth Calls for Proposals	http://www.cordis.lu/growth/src/callmain.htm
c) Proposal Submission Documents	http://www.cordis.lu/growth/src/participation.htm
d) Growth Documents including : Work-Programme, Evaluation Guidelines, publications on FP4 Networks etc.	http://www.cordis.lu/growth/src/library.htm
Growth Publicity Home Page for further information of general nature.	http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/growth