

Annex 3: Rules and Procedures for Block Grants, the Project Preparation Facility, the Technical Assistance Fund and the Scholarship Fund in the Framework of the Estonian-Swiss Cooperation Programme

Annex 3 is an integral part of the Agreement between the Government of Estonia and the Swiss Federal Council concerning the implementation of the Estonian-Swiss Cooperation Programme. Annex 3 describes definition and purpose, selection of Intermediate Bodies, content of agreements, eligibility of costs and co-financing as well as roles and responsibilities for:

- A. Block Grant**
- B. Project Preparation Facility**
- C. Technical Assistance Fund**
- D. Scholarship Fund**

A. Block Grant

1. Definition and purpose

Block Grants are funds, set up for a clearly defined purpose, providing assistance to organizations or institutions, facilitating a cost-effective administration in programmes with many small projects.

Block Grants may be established on national, regional or local level. They enable organisations or institutions to: address pertinent issues through small projects and enhance their capacities.

In general, small projects shall: have a non-profit character and be in the range of 5'000.- to 100'000.- Swiss francs.

2. Selection of the Block Grant Intermediate Body

A Block Grant Intermediate Body may be a public or private sector body or a non-governmental organisation constituted as a legal entity in Estonia and operating in the public interest.

In principal, the Block Grant Intermediate Body should have strong ties to the sector in which a Block Grant is to be implemented.

The selection of the Block Grant Intermediate Body may follow a two step procedure agreed between the National Coordination Unit (NCU) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). Applicants may submit an outline of the envisaged Block Grant before submitting a complete application. Outlines and full applications shall be commented by the NCU and submitted to SDC for approval.

SDC shall assess whether a proposed Block Grant Intermediate Body is suitable for granting assistance and whether the suggested implementation set-up is adequate. Based on the assessment, SDC shall provide feedback to the NCU and the Block Grant Intermediate Body and shall decide on the financing of the Block Grant.

3. Block Grant Agreement

For each Block Grant, an agreement shall be prepared by the NCU based on a standard Block Grant Agreement provided by SDC. The Block Grant Agreement shall be signed by the NCU, SDC and the selected Block Grant Intermediate Body. The content of the Block Grant Agreement shall include i.a.:

- Objectives of the Block Grant;
- Organisational structure, roles and responsibilities (incl. constitution of a steering and small project approval committee);
- Procedures for the assessment and selection of small projects (incl. selection criteria);
- Co-financing rules and procedures;
- Implementation schedule;
- Budget and financial planning (incl. management costs);
- Disbursement and audit procedures;
- Monitoring and steering;
- Reporting;
- Publicity measures.

4. Eligibility of costs and co-financing

Eligible costs for the management and administration of the Block Grant shall be defined in the Block Grant Agreement.

Small projects implemented by the Block Grant Intermediate Body on its own are not eligible for funding by the Block Grant.

The Block Grant's contribution to small projects shall be determined on a case-by-case basis and may reach up to 100%.

Support by the Block Grant shall not replace subsidised facilities and bank loans.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

Roles and responsibilities of the NCU include:

- Propose the establishment of Block Grants;
- Ensure the establishment of Block Grants including invitation or call for proposals, Block Grant Intermediate Body pre-selection, preparation of agreement;
- Ensure the supervision of Block Grants by establishing adequate monitoring, steering and auditing systems;
- Establish financial control mechanisms;
- Nominate a representative in the steering and small project approval committee;
- Control the efficient and effective use of the Block Grants;
- Ensure regular reporting to SDC on the implementation progress of Block Grants, as well as ensure immediate reporting in case of any irregularities;
- Ensure auditing and follow-up to audit recommendations;
- Ensure inclusion of the Block Grants in the general publicity on the Contribution.

Roles and responsibilities of the Block Grant Intermediate Body include:

- Overall management of the Block Grant;
- Establish a steering and small project approval committee and act as its secretary;
- Establish an adequate financial and operational controlling system for small project implementation;
- Call for and collect proposals for small projects, review compliance with the proposal requirements and establish selection recommendations;
- Establish contracting arrangements with the organisations and institutions implementing the small projects;
- Apply controlling systems and intervene if required. Inform the NCU on irregularities immediately;
- Report to the NCU. Reporting includes at least an annual progress report and financial reports;
- Publicity on the Block Grant implementation.

Roles and responsibilities of the steering and small project approval committee include:

- Select small projects for implementation;
- Discuss progress reports;
- Review and adapt small project selection criteria.

Roles and responsibilities of SDC include:

- Approve in principle the establishment of Block Grants;
- Provide feedback on outlines for Block Grants;
- Decide on the financing of Block Grants;
- Nominate a representative or an observer in the steering and small project approval committee;
- Monitor implementation progress on a general level;
- Assess and discuss implementation progress with the NCU based on annual reporting by the NCU.

Roles and responsibilities may periodically be reviewed. A first review shall take place during the first annual meeting of the Parties.

B. Project Preparation Facility

1. Definition and purpose

A “Project Preparation Facility” provides financial support for the preparation of the Final Project Proposals (e.g. feasibility studies, environmental impact assessments, etc.).

2. Request and approval procedures

A request for financial support within the Project Preparation Facility must be part of the Project outline (cf. Annex 2, Chapter 2.1).

SDC or SECO shall assess whether the requested assistance for project preparation is suitable for financial support.

The decision on the provision for financial support for the project preparation is part of the final decision by Switzerland on the Project outline.

3. Management of the Project Preparation Facility

The Intermediate Body of the Project Preparation Facility is the NCU.

4. Project Preparation Facility Agreement

The Project Preparation Facility Agreement shall be prepared and signed by the NCU on the Estonian side and by SDC / SECO on the Swiss side. The content of the Project Preparation Facility Agreement shall include i.a.:

- Objectives of the Project Preparation Facility;
- Roles and responsibilities;
- Detailed listing of costs eligible for financing;
- Co-financing;
- Audit procedures, monitoring and reporting.

5. Co-financing

Financial means provided by the Project Preparation Facility require a minimum co-financing of 15% by the recipient or any third party. The co-financing rate shall be determined on a case-by-case basis.

C. Technical Assistance Fund

1. Definition and purpose

A Technical Assistance Fund may be established to contribute to some additional costs incurred by Estonia for the efficient and effective implementation of the Contribution.

2. Eligible costs

Costs incurred by the Estonian authorities for the management, implementation, monitoring and control of the Contribution are in general not eligible for financing. However, some costs incurred by the Estonian authorities for tasks performed additionally and exclusively for the implementation of the Contribution are eligible for financing, if they belong to one of the following categories:

- a) Costs of the committees established in the framework of the Estonian-Swiss Cooperation Programme as defined in the Technical Assistance Fund Agreement;
- b) Training for potential Executing Agencies with the objective to prepare them for the Estonian-Swiss Cooperation Programme;

- c) Hiring of consultants for the review of Project proposals addressed to the NCU and the preparation of financing requests to Switzerland;
- d) Hiring of consultants for the monitoring and for the review of Projects financed by the Contribution and of the overall Estonian-Swiss Cooperation Programme;
- e) Audits and on the spot checks of operations related to the Contribution, where this relates to activities above and beyond the normal obligations of Estonia;
- f) Publicity measures related to the Contribution;
- g) Costs for the participation in meetings with Swiss authorities held outside of Estonia;
- h) Translation costs of the NCU and Intermediate Bodies at the level of the management of the Swiss Contribution;
- i) Additional equipment, including software, specifically procured for the implementation of the Contribution.

3. Intermediate Body for the Technical Assistance Fund

The Intermediate Body of the Technical Assistance Fund is the NCU.

4. Technical Assistance Fund Agreement

The Technical Assistance Fund Agreement shall be prepared and signed by the NCU on the Estonian side and by SDC / SECO on the Swiss side. The content of the Technical Assistance Fund Agreement shall include inter alia:

- Objectives of the Technical Assistance Fund;
- Detailed listing of costs eligible for financing;
- Organisational structure, roles and responsibilities;
- Procedures;
- Budget and financial planning;
- Audit procedures;
- Monitoring and steering;
- Reporting.

D. Scholarship Fund

1. Definition and purpose

A Scholarship Fund shall be established. It shall provide financing for educational and research scholarships for Estonian graduate students and researchers admitted at higher education and research institutions in Switzerland.

Educational scholarships shall enhance the development of high quality human resources, encourage networking and initiate cooperation among young academics.

Research scholarships shall promote excellence in research, allow outstanding personal achievements of junior and senior researchers, stimulate networking and enhance Estonian-Swiss research cooperation. Research scholarships may be linked to the creation of trans-national teams and joint research projects.

2. Intermediate Body for the Scholarship Fund

The Intermediate Body for the management of a Scholarship Fund is a Swiss institution.

3. Scholarship Fund Agreement

The Scholarship Fund Agreement shall be prepared by the Intermediate Body. It shall be signed by the NCU on the Estonian side and by the SDC on the Swiss side. The content of the Scholarship Fund Agreement shall include inter alia:

- Objectives of the Scholarship Fund;
- Detailed listing of costs eligible for financing;
- Organisational structure, roles and responsibilities;
- Procedures;
- Budget and financial planning;
- Audit procedures;
- Monitoring and steering;
- Reporting.

4. Eligible costs

Eligible costs include scholarships costs such as displacement, living expenses, insurance, matriculation fees, specific research and publication costs.