



ANNOUNCEMENT AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

COVID-19 Call for Project Applications

20th May 2020 – 30th September 2020

Background

The Northern Periphery and Arctic 2014-2020 Programme is part of the European Territorial Cooperation Objective supported by the European Regional Development Fund. The programme contributes to and aligns with the Europe 2020 Strategy, national and regional policies and development strategies, macro regional and sea basin strategies, and other programmes covering parts of the geographical area.

The programme's vision is to assist in the generation of vibrant, competitive and sustainable communities, by harnessing innovation, expanding the capacity for entrepreneurship and seizing the unique growth initiatives and opportunities of the Northern and Arctic regions in a resource efficient way.

Rationale

The global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is unprecedented in recent history. On a European level, the European Commission has promptly responded to this health and economic crisis by increasing the flexibility in the use of Structural Funds ([CRII+](#)) and mobilising resources for the Member states. In addition, it has recently established a [COVID-19 Data Portal](#) to bring together relevant datasets for sharing and analysis in an effort to accelerate coronavirus research.

The Committee of the Regions is calling on additional resources and a better coordination between national, regional and local authorities, as well as more efficient cross-border coordination.

The NPA programme would like to make use of the flexibility offered by the EU institutions and the invaluable results of years of transnational cooperation in the areas of healthcare and digital care.

The specific circumstances of the NPA programme area create excellent circumstances for e-health expertise: the area is unique in Europe when it comes to low population density, creating specific challenges for public service provision dealing with low critical mass and long distances. The area has one of the oldest populations in Europe, creating specific risk factors as well as pressures on the healthcare system, and fewer working age people supporting many older people. Additionally, the area has a good broadband infrastructure, allowing for the use of new technologies. Besides this, communities in remote regions have a high degree of self reliance, and community response.

Over several programming periods, the NPA programme has built up a track record of supporting the development of innovative solutions to deal with challenges specific to remote and sparsely populated communities. This has resulted, for example in a cluster of e-health expertise in the NPA community willing to volunteer and mobilise for the benefit of all Europeans to understand the effects of the COVID-19 virus. Currently, an "[NPA COVID-19 response group](#)" has been established (See Annex 1).

Purpose:

In order for the NPA to make use of the opportunities offered by the CRII+ and to keep the momentum of the NPA COVID-19 Response Group, it was decided to open a preparatory project call as soon as possible.

This call is open for projects to draw on the extensive e-health expertise among NPA projects and others, to explore adaptive responses to the COVID-19 virus, to exchange innovative solutions and to pool information for the benefit of the general public and healthcare staff.

The NPA expertise collected through a COVID-19 call could be mobilised for the benefit of all Europeans in the fight against the spread of the COVID-19 virus, and a better handling of the pressures on the healthcare system and society at large. The new knowledge developed as part of this call shall inform future actions supported by the programme.

Terms of Reference for COVID-19 Call

For the call for COVID-19 Call Preparatory project applications, the Monitoring committee (MC) has agreed to support projects under the following conditions.

Themes:

The projects should look at ways in which cooperation can effectively help address the multiple challenges posed by this COVID-19 crisis across the NPA programme area. Six themes have been identified, where joint collaborative efforts could be beneficial:

- A. **Clinical aspects:** comparing the different response measures taken by the respective countries, map the rate of infections and observe differences in comparison to national and local COVID strategies; e.g. in rural vs urban areas
- B. **Health and well being:** The impact of self-isolation on people and their mental health – elderly people and other vulnerable groups who already suffer isolation will be impacted even worse from this situation, but there is a wider effect on the entire population which shall be investigated
- C. **Technology solutions:** What e-health solutions already exist and what should be put in place? How can technology be brought to those people who need it and/or don't know how to use it? What are the technologies with the lowest threshold? How can we fast track innovation?
- D. **Citizen engagement/ Community response:** Small peripheral communities are more self-sufficient, what lessons can they share?
- E. **Economic impacts:** What will be the impact on the public health system now and next year? In what ways have our societies and economies been transformed already? And how will they be transformed in the medium and long term?
- F. **Emerging themes:** project ideas that fit in the rationale of the call, but do not fall within the themes outlined at the time this Call has been opened. Considering that the situation is constantly developing and that new relevant themes might appear at a later point in time, the Programme will consider applications falling under this category, that reflect a change in the situation or an aspect which has been disregarded.
- G. **Umbrella project:** in addition to the thematic projects, the MC is looking to fund 1 Umbrella project with the following tasks:
 - Appoint an NPA Covid-19 response group Coordinator
 - Overall coordination of the work of the thematic projects ensuring consistency with the rationale of the NPA Covid-19 response group, timely delivery of expected deliverables and alike, an appropriate flow of information across the projects.
 - Community management e.g. keep momentum among the experts members of the group and manage membership.
 - Communications and outreach: act as spokesperson towards the programme, target groups and other interested institutional or non-institutional parties;

produce and distribute information about and from the work of the thematic projects through the appropriate channels; liaise with Joint Secretariat on a regular basis.

- Deliver a packaged output: collect and collate all the new knowledge produced by the thematic projects and organise it in a way that can inform the future NPA projects as well as the programming process of the NPA 2021-2027, e.g. an executive summary per theme. Such material shall contribute to form an understanding of the post-Covid-19 NPA regions and communities. In addition, it shall contribute to an increased preparedness in case of similar events and empower the society and public organisations in the NPA regions to better respond to the changed needs of the society.

Project Budget: Indicative maximum budget of up to 45.000 EUR at an intervention rate of 100%. The budget will be paid on a lump sum basis upon completion of the project and meeting the conditions for funding. In total, the MC has earmarked 300.000 EUR for this call.

NPA Eligibility Rules: The NPA Eligibility Rules and minimum requirements for preparatory projects apply with the following call specific adaptations:

- An eligible project idea addressing one of the four Priority Axes, and one of the themes listed above. **Please note:** the call mainly targets specific objectives 1.2 and 4. If choosing another specific objective, please be in touch with the Joint Secretariat.
- Completion of a preparatory project application form, including a work plan in line with the expected results listed below.
- The project involves minimum 2 partners from different 2 programme partner countries in the NPA area, one of which is located in a European Union Member State
- An eligible Lead Partner
- The call is open to applicants that have been involved in previous NPA/NPP projects as well as applicants who are new to the programme. Applicants are expected to join the NPA COVID-19 Response Group, which acts as an inclusive reference group, to see how they can join partnerships with others. In addition, during and after the application process, preparatory projects are expected to coordinate with the umbrella project on a regular basis and keep them informed about progress.

Indicative Project duration: 2-4 months

Application procedure

This is an ongoing call between the opening and closing date, meaning that applicants can submit an application at any time during the period **20th May 2020 – 30th September 2020**. Applicants are expected to submit their thematic application under the coordination of the overarching Umbrella project.

Applications shall be submitted via the online monitoring system (eMS) at this link: ems.interreg-npa.eu. (Ref Programme manual section 2.6.1)

Decision process

Decisions on preparatory projects are made by the Joint Secretariat with input from Regional Contact Points. The approval process takes approximately 1 month from submission.

Expected results

Projects are expected to make an overview of and analyse the state of the COVID-19 crisis, as well as successful and less successful practices in the NPA area relevant to the chosen theme and the geographical context, to be able to make recommendations for future actions, policy responses, etc.

A final report should include evidence of the work undertaken, as well as testimonials, and materials for dissemination.

Assistance to applicants

Online Q&A session on **May 27 at 13:00 CET**. (Details to be announced on NPA website)

OPENING OF COVID – 19 CALL:	20 th May 2020
APPLICATION DEADLINE:	30 th September 2020, 23:59 CET
DECISION DATE:	2-4 weeks

Guidance for applicants

See the NPA 2014-2020 Programme Manual ([click to download](#)) for a description of the Priority Axes, instructions for how to apply and the NPA eligibility rules. This and all other application documents can be found on the COVID-19 Call page.

All applicants are asked to join the NPA Covid-19 response group. [Click here](#) to read a recent article about the NPA Covid-19 response group and instructions to join.

Project time line

All approved project are expected to be completed no later than February 2021 including reporting and claiming.

Further information

If you are interested in applying, we recommend that you are in touch with the Regional Contact Point in your region, click [here](#) for contact details. Alternatively, you can contact Christopher Parker at the Joint Secretariat, christopher.parker@interreg-npa.eu

Annex - NPA COVID-19 response group

The “NPA COVID-19 Response Group” is an informal group of experts who have participated in or led a Northern Periphery and Arctic [NPA] e-health project.

The group was established by Dr David Heaney, lead partner of several NPP and NPA healthcare projects, and quickly gathered a large group of engaged health experts based in the NPA programme area.

All members believe that working together is a valuable approach and much needed in times of crisis such as the circumstances we are currently facing with COVID-19.

The group covers the following areas of expertise for example:

- clinical, including rural GPs, and public health specialists
- health service management, with input from managers and health service procurement staff
- experts in digital technology, mental health, and social science

The members of the group collaborate on a voluntary basis.