



GOVERNMENT OF MALTA
PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIAT
FOR YOUTH, RESEARCH
AND INNOVATION

Research Networking Scheme (RNS) – 2024 Call 2

Rules for Participation – Non-State Aid

1.0 Introduction:

Xjenza Malta is receiving proposals under the Research Networking Scheme (RNS).

This scheme will be made up of two components as follows:

1. Networking Scheme: This Scheme will support opportunities for collaborative initiatives between Maltese public entities or Public Research and Knowledge Dissemination Organisations that meet the eligibility criteria and at least one foreign counterpart of proven track record of excellence. Proposals should describe the nature of the joint activities that would be funded through this Scheme. Applicants are to demonstrate how the proposed activities contribute towards and align with achieving the goals of the National R&I Strategy and to describe the potential of any activities to become self-sustaining or generate longer-term outcomes.

The activities that will be funded under this Scheme should promote internationalisation through at least one of the following:

- the development of joint teaching curricula for Masters or PhD students.
- placements for local researchers in foreign institutions for the purposes of furthering research & innovation collaboration.
- the arrangement of strategic and targeted visits by local academics/researchers and representatives of private entities to foreign entities in order to participate in research & innovation activities of an exploratory and developmental nature.
- the organisation of seminars or workshops on a particular research and innovation area held in Malta that would benefit from the participation of foreign experts.

- the development of transnational research & innovation proposals for submission to third party-funders, e.g. AGRIP, EASME - COSME, EPLUS, Horizon Europe, Life Programme, etc.

2. Open Access Journal Support: This opportunity will support researchers who have already benefited from Xjenza Malta research grants to publish their research done with the support of the RNS grant on a peer reviewed open access journal. The publication should be strictly related to projects funded by Xjenza Malta.

2.0 Definitions

- Applicant means any entity eligible to apply in terms of these Rules for Participation and who consequently applies for funding under this scheme.
- Coordinator entity/ Project Coordinator is one of the beneficiaries of a project consortium that is appointed as the single point of contact between Xjenza Malta and the consortium partners from proposal submission to project end. The coordinator entity will have the responsibility of ensuring that all the partners involved in the consortium are eligible and supervises the project workflow with the help of WP leaders. Additionally, the Coordinator entity will be required to submit the project application on behalf of the consortium and must also compile and submit reports / deliverables to the funding bodies which in turn will relay these documents to the Lead Agency.
- Managing Authority refers to Xjenza Malta.
- Public Entity is any Ministry, Department, Entity, Authority, Public Commission, Public Sector Foundation, or similar organisation that does not carry out an economic activity within the meaning of Article 107 TFEU and that exercises public power, or else acts in its own capacity as public authority, where the activity in question forms part of

the essential function of the State or is connected with those functions by its nature, its aim and the rules to which it is subject. However, the classification of a particular entity as an undertaking depends entirely on the nature of its activities, and the overriding criterion of consideration is whether it carries out an economic activity or not, e.g. an entity that is formally part of the public administration may nevertheless have to be regarded as an undertaking within the meaning of Article 107(1) of the Treaty. Thus, an entity that carries out both economic and non-economic activities is to be regarded as an undertaking only with regards to the former. In this case, if the economic activity can be separated from the exercise of public powers, then that entity acts as an undertaking in relation to that activity and the financing, the costs and the revenues of that economic activity shall be accounted for separately from the other non-commercial activities.

If an economic activity cannot be separated from the exercise of public power, the activities exercised by that entity as a whole, remain connected with the exercise of those public powers and therefore fall outside the notion of an undertaking.

- Research and Development is defined as the systematic investigation, work or research carried out in any field of science or technology through experiment, theoretical work or analysis undertaken in order to acquire new knowledge, primarily directed towards a specific practical aim or objective, and includes:
 - a) Fundamental Research means experimental or theoretical work undertaken primarily to acquire new knowledge of the underlying foundations of phenomena and observable facts, without any direct commercial application or use in view.
 - b) Industrial Research means the planned research or critical investigation aimed at the acquisition of new knowledge and skills for developing new products, processes or services or for bringing about a significant improvement in

existing products, processes or services. It comprises the creation of components parts of complex systems and may include the construction of prototypes in a laboratory environment or in an environment with simulated interfaces to existing systems as well as of pilot lines, when necessary for the industrial research and notably for generic technology validation.

c) Experimental Development means acquiring, combining, shaping and using existing scientific, technological, business and other relevant knowledge and skills with the aim of developing new or improved products, processes or services. This may also include, for example, activities aiming at the conceptual definition, planning and documentation of new products, processes or services. Experimental development may comprise prototyping, demonstrating, piloting, testing and validation of new or improved products, processes or services in environments representative of real-life operating conditions where the primary objective is to make further technical improvements on products, processes or services that are not substantially set. This may include the development of a commercially usable prototype or pilot which is necessarily the final commercial product, and which is too expensive to produce for it to be used only for demonstration and validation purposes. Experimental development does not include routine or periodic changes made to existing products, production lines, manufacturing processes, services and other operations in progress, even if those changes may represent improvements.

- Letter of support is a document where the entity listed as partner in the project is showing their commitment in supporting the project including (if applicable) the confirmation of additional funding.
- Research and Knowledge-dissemination Organisation means an entity (such as universities or research institutes, technology transfer agencies, innovation

intermediaries, research-oriented physical or virtual collaborative entities), irrespective of its legal status (organised under public or private law) or way of financing, whose primary goal is to independently conduct fundamental research, industrial research or experimental development or to widely disseminate the results of such activities by way of teaching, publication or knowledge transfer. Where such entity also pursues economic activities, the financing, the costs and the revenues of those economic activities must be accounted for separately. Undertakings that can exert a decisive influence upon such an entity, in the quality of, for example, shareholders or members, may not enjoy preferential access to the results generated by it.

- Operating base in Malta means if the legal entity:
 - a. owns, leases, or has been given the right of use by a third party, an adequate premise from where to conduct an eligible economic activity in the region of Malta;
 - and
 - b. employs at least one person that is based in Malta and is liable to pay income tax in Malta.
- Partner is defined as a partner in a consortium of a funded project.

3.0 Eligibility Criteria

The applicant must be an entity that does not carry out an economic activity within the meaning of Article 107 TFEU and that is registered as one of the following:

- i. Public research and knowledge-dissemination organisation;
- ii. Public entity.



Applicants who have other funded projects with the Managing Authority and are in default, and/or have gone beyond the timelines of the project, are not eligible to participate.

Any application submitted by or including the participation of any legal person or legal entity having, in totality or in majority ownership, the same shareholders, partners or persons holding and / or exercising a controlling power in any other legal entity which will have been at any time prior to such application declares as non-compliant or defaulting on any other contract or agreement entered into with the Managing Authority, shall be automatically declared as inadmissible.

Funding under this scheme is made available on the basis that the Applicant has not benefited and will not benefit from any other grant or financial incentive of whatever nature, applied for and/or utilised for the same scope as that subject of the funding requested under this scheme.

Networking Scheme: Eligible applicants are to partner up with international institutions with a proven track record of excellence and experience in the research and innovation field that will form the basis for cooperation.

Open Access Journal Support: Eligible applicants can apply for a grant to publish their research on an open access journal. The published research should be related to other research projects funded by the Managing Authority.

N.B. In case an applicant applies for both the Networking Scheme and the Open Access Journal Support and is awarded for the Open Access Journal Support only, the award will be granted only if the applicant has benefited from a Xjenza Malta grant related to the publication.

4.0 Financing

Each applicant is invited to provide a breakdown of the anticipated costs to carry out the proposed activities as part of the application form. Xjenza Malta reserves the right to negotiate any amount quoted by the applicant should this be considered as being over-estimated.

The amount of aid awarded to any one successful applicant under the Networking Scheme is capped at €8,000. Applicants who apply for the Open Access Journal Support can have their grant increased by a maximum of €4,000, totalling to up to €12,000.

Eligible costs:

- flights for travel related to the project (the total amount for each flight should be estimated as costing no more than €1,000 for EU countries and €2,000 for non-EU countries and should be an economy class ticket);
- travel insurance (obligatory with all flights funded with RNS grant);
- subsistence allowance (inclusive of accommodation and travel from and to airport) - when subsistence costs are calculated the local entity's pre-approved subsistence allowances should be used;
- Conference Registrations attended abroad and related to the project (up to €2,000)
- catering and up to two hosted meals per day (strictly in relation to meetings, workshops and seminars hosted by the applicant in Malta);
- information and promotional material (as long as these are necessary to ensure the effectiveness and success of the collaboration);
- Media Articles and outreach related to the project (up to €1,500). (Publications for open access journal are not eligible under this clause);



- Publication in an open access journal (When the Open Access Journal Support is awarded). There is a limit of one publication for each grant.

Furthermore, supplementary or match-funding from the foreign partner is allowed and encouraged, as long as it does not finance the same activities that will be funded through the Research Networking Scheme (RNS). Proposals including such supplementary or match funding from partner institutions will be prioritised.

Xjenza Malta will provide funds at the start of the collaborative project.

Funds related to the Open Access Journal Support will be provided once we have proof of the publication (a copy of the publication) and all the relevant receipts related to the publication.

Ineligible costs:

- Consumables
- Equipment
- Internal Invoices (Invoices issued by the beneficiary (i.e. to hire their own venue)
- Expenses related to loans, interests and recoverable value added tax
- Expenses related to travel and subsistence for the international partners when events are held abroad.

No double funding is permitted for the same activities carried out in RNS and in conjunction with other schemes.

Award holders will be responsible for arranging all relevant activities including, but not limited to, travel plans, accommodation, logistics planning, insurance coverage for any



participant travel, etc. The Applicant should provide an approximate breakdown of the anticipated costs to carry out the project's activities in the application form. These can be altered in accordance with section 8 of these rules for participation.

To apply under these National Rules, the applicant needs to adhere to the justifications indicated in the application form by the applicant, as to why the activities to be undertaken do not meet the criteria of Article 107(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (i.e., not falling under State Aid implications).

Additional Provisions

Eligible Costs are to conform to the following and are subject to the final audit scrutiny:

- Any expenses incurred during the project must be consistent with the principles of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness.

5.0 Submission of Application Form

Interested Applicants are to submit their application form electronically to the Managing Authority at networking.xjenzamalta@gov.mt keeping Mr Robert Cauchi robert.cauchi@gov.mt and Dr Alessandra Loria alessandra.loria@gov.mt in copy with "RNS - Application 2024" as a subject heading by not later than Friday 8st November 2024 at 23:30pm.

The application must be dated and signed by the applicant and the legal representative. Late or incomplete applications will not be considered.

Submissions should include the following documents:



➤ the 'Research Networking Scheme - 2024 Application Form' provided by Xjenza Malta that is associated with this call.

- letters of support from all partner institutions, confirming any matching or additional funding.
- full CVs of principal investigator/s from local and partner institution/s.
- profile of potential partners.
- agenda of event, activities, training etc...
- Public Entities not Research Knowledge Dissemination Organisation (non-RKDO) Form (if applicable)
- Public Research Knowledge Dissemination Organisation (RKDO) Form (if applicable)

It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure the timely and correct delivery of the application form to Xjenza Malta. It should be noted that large emails may be automatically rejected by the system. The applicant may make use of cloud storage or mass file transfer systems (e.g., WeTransfer). It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that application documents are sent out successfully. All received applications shall be acknowledged by email. Proposals which are received after the deadline stipulated of the call will not be considered and will be deemed administratively non-compliant.

6.0 Selection Process

Applications will be assessed by a selection panel set up by Xjenza Malta against the following criteria that have the same weight.



In the case of the Networking Scheme (i.e. the collaborative portion of the scheme) the following criteria will apply:

- Quality of Project/Activity:
 - Proposals will be evaluated on the quality of the collaboration activities with the foreign partners. Activities must either be, or be supportive of, high quality international research & innovation with the potential to yield mutually beneficial results and demonstrate innovation and interdisciplinary in the selected field of interest. The involvement of early career researchers (i.e. at Masters or PhD level) in the implementation of the internationalisation activities will be considered an advantage.

- Strength of Partnership and Leadership:
 - Projects/activities must be led by recognised experts with a demonstrated track record in research and innovation and good leadership ability. Evidence of past collaborative work between the partnering institutions, for example, joint projects or publications, and any other relevant past achievements will be considered a testament to the strength of the partnership.
 - New partnerships between local and foreign entities in the interest of furthering R&I collaboration are also encouraged with the aim of fostering closer ties between local and international institutions. A convincing case should be made for the benefits of the partnership(s).

➤ Outcomes and Sustainability:

- Proposed activities must have significant potential outcomes, including, for example, joint publications, subsequent grant bids, development of innovative products, etc., and will build longer term international relationships based on a genuine commitment by the partners to invest in a sustained successful partnership. Evidence of the potential to attract or generate external funding will be considered an asset.

Priority will be given to well-defined proposals which demonstrates increased odds of success for securing third party-funding or which demonstrate a clear benefit to enhancing the international dimension of local research & innovation activity.

In the case of the Open Access Journal Support the following criteria will apply:

Excellence of the proposed project idea to be published on the open access journal
- 30%

- Novelty of the research idea or approach.
- Relevance of the proposed project to the goals of the open-access journal.
- Significance of the research question or problem being addressed and coherence in the presentation of ideas and logical flow of the proposal including research objectives.

Impact Factor - 50%

- Reputation and credibility of the open-access journal/s in the relevant field.
- Consistency and quality of publications in the journal/s.
- Reach and dissemination of research published in the journal/s, including citations and readership.

- Inclusion of the journal in reputable indexing services (e.g., PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science).
- Journal metrics such as the Impact Factor, Eigenfactor, and h-index.

Likelihood of publication in the intended journal/s – 20%

- Alignment of the proposed project with the scope and focus areas of the intended journal.
- Track record of the researchers/authors in publishing in similar journals.
- The status of the publication.

7.0 Award Duration

Upon successful completion of the evaluation stage, it may be necessary for Xjenza Malta to negotiate the amount of the Award requested in the application form. Xjenza Malta retains the right to provide awards of a different sum should the amount in the 'breakdown of costs' appears to have been overestimated.

The deadline for completion of the projects/activities funded through the award is one (1) year from the starting date on the grant agreement, although projects may be completed at any point within the one (1) year time frame. When the grant awarded includes both the Networking Scheme and the Open Access Journal Support, the time frame will be 18 months. Requests for an extension of the award will not be considered. Any activities/deliverables related to the award cannot start before the grant agreement is signed by Xjenza Malta legal representative.

All financial Invoices/Receipts should be dated through the lifetime of the project. Payments done outside the lifetime of the project will not be accepted. Upon completion

of the activities/projects, the applicant is to submit a final report within 30 days according to a standard template developed by Xjenza Malta. The final report will need to be accompanied by all relevant documentation, including receipts demonstrating how the award was spent. Xjenza Malta retains the right to audit the financial documentation and to request further proof of expenditure of the award. Should there be a significant discrepancy between the sum of the award disbursed by Xjenza Malta and the amount spent by the applicant (as substantiated through receipts or other financial documentation) Xjenza Malta retains the right to request a reimbursement of the unspent funds.

8.0 Deviations

Applicants should note that:

- Transfers of project funds between line items over the duration of the project that are cumulatively less than 20% of the grant value are automatically eligible provided that:
 - i. the limits mentioned in the Rules of Participation are adhered to
 - ii. expenses are exclusively used throughout the project lifetime to the sole benefit of the project
 - iii. requested costs should be eligible as per Rules of Participation
- Should transfers of project funds between line items are cumulatively greater than 20% of the grant value, these will be considered as significant alterations to the proposal and will not be eligible.

No transfer of funds is allowed between the Networking Scheme and the Open Access Journal Support

Kindly note that with respect to transfer of project funds, these should be reflected in the final financial report.



Applicants are reminded of the importance of retaining all documents proving expenditure of the awarded funds for submission with the final report.

If the implementation of a project becomes impossible, Xjenza Malta shall be entitled to take any action it deems necessary, including, but not limited to, the withdrawal of funding for the project and the collection of refunds of money already paid out. A similar course of action may be followed if a project is in default as a result of not meeting one or more of its obligations. However, Xjenza Malta will provide a notice indicating a rectification period of one (1) month.

9.0 Correspondence

Any communication, notice or report shall quote the Agreement number in the subject or title.

Successful applicants will be required to inform the Managing Authority at networking.xjenzamalta@gov.mt at Xjenza Malta regularly of any direct or indirect outputs resulting from this award during and beyond the lifetime of the award.

Reference to this award should be made on any publication, marketing or PR material that is generated in relation to the project or activity undertaken.

10.0 Final Reporting

Successful applicants are also required to submit a detailed report on the activities undertaken to the Managing Authority within thirty (30) days from the date of completion

of the activities funded by the Award. For those activities extending for the full duration of this Scheme (i.e., one year from the starting date on the grant agreement), final reports should be submitted to Xjenza Malta by no later than 30 days from that date. Xjenza Malta reserves the right to take any necessary legal action should such reporting not be submitted.

Required documents as final report:

- i) Final Technical Report
- ii) Final Financial Report
- iii) Other financial documents as flight tickets, boarding passes and other receipts.
- iv) A copy of the publication in open access journal and all relevant receipts (if applicable)

11.0 Referencing and Acknowledgements

Any articles and text material related to the project should include the words:

'Project <Project Name> financed by Xjenza Malta through the Research Networking Scheme (RNS).'

This acknowledgement will need to be included on any dissemination material submitted to the Managing Authority to be considered as fulfilling the obligations of the grant agreement. This is fundamental for the completion of the open access portion of this grant.

In the case where printed material is published without a mention of the RNS and the Managing Authority, the beneficiary shall be obliged to publish a correction at its own

expense in the subsequent issue of the publication. In the case where such publicity does not mention the Research Networking Scheme and the Managing Authority, associated costs will be considered ineligible.

12.0 Interpretation of the Rules

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

13.0 Confidentiality of Submissions

Unless otherwise indicated, all application submissions shall be treated in strict confidence.

The data collected by the Managing Authority via the application for the aid and its subsequent processing by the Managing Authority to evaluate data subject's request for aid under the Scheme is in line with:

- i. The National Rules for Participation;
- ii. Data Protection Act, Chapter 586 of the Laws of Malta and Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Managing Authority 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).
- iii. The legitimate basis to process personal data submitted by the data subject by virtue of his/her written application for aid is Regulation 6 (1)(b) of the General



Data Protection Regulation ("GDPR"), as 'processing is necessary in order to take steps at the request of the data subject prior to entering into a contract'.

14.0 Further Information

For further information on the Research Networking Scheme (RNS) kindly contact Mr. Robert Cauchi or Dr. Alessandra Loria as per details below:

Mr. Robert Cauchi

R&I Administrator

R&I Programmes Unit

Xjenza Malta

Tel: +356 2360 2136 or 2360 2000

Email: robert.cauchi@gov.mt

Dr. Alessandra Loria

R&I Executive

R&I Programmes Unit

Xjenza Malta

Tel: +356 23602111

Email: alessandra.loria@gov.mt