Interreg

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Meuse – Rhine (NL – BE – DE)

Project modifications - procedures

Interreg Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE)

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1. Introduction

It is important to allow projects implemented under the Interreg VI-A Meuse-Rhine (NL-BE-DE) programme to be modified so that they can adapt to certain unforeseen and/or new circumstances or events.

These modifications fall into two categories:

- Minor modifications which may or may not require MA/JS approval;
- Major modifications which require Steering Committee approval.

Regardless of the type of modification, the Lead Partner needs to keep the Project Manager informed of the intention to submit a modification and to comply with all the steps required to complete it. A modification may only be implemented after receiving the necessary approvals as detailed in this document. Each request must be thoroughly explained and justified through the template available on the JEMS (*via Export > Export Plugin > Modification request MR*). The different steps to follow in the monitoring system JEMS are detailed at the end of this document.

In line with the cooperation agreement signed between the Lead Partner and the project partners, the project members must always keep in touch and ensure that any modification request submitted for approval has been previously discussed and agreed upon by all the partners. It is the responsibility of the Lead Partner to ensure that it has the approval of the partnership when starting the procedure related to a modification request. Each partnership is free to establish its own internal rules regarding the process for requesting changes within the consortium.

Each change should be approved before it enters into force. Failure to comply with these procedures is the sole responsibility of the Lead Partner/Partner and may lead to the non-reimbursement of the expenses resulting from these changes.

A modification request must be emailed to the project manager with all supporting documents no later than 6 months before the project end date.

The history of modifications can easily, for each project, be traced/extracted from JEMS.

2. Minor modifications

Minor modifications are modifications that do not impact the project's results, objectives, or the amount of the ERDF and other public co-financings, nor do they affect the composition of the partnership.

2.1. Minor modifications which do not require MA/JS approval (informal modifications)

Some project modifications, which are informal, may be possible without the formal approval of the MA/JS. This is the case when modifications do not affect the grant letter's content concluded between the programme and the project.

2.1.1. Minor modifications which do not require MA/JS approval can be (non-exhaustive list)

- Modifications of names, addresses;
- Other administrative changes on the level of the partnership.

2.1.2. General conditions for the request and process:

1. The JS Project Manager must be consulted by the Lead Partner before any modification request.
2. The Lead Partner must submit a request in JEMS using the template available (*Export > Export Plugin > Modification request MR*), which details the foreseen modifications.
3. The MA/JS conducts a technical control of the request (especially assessing if the modification instead requires MA/JS or Steering Committee approval and/or ensuring that it triggers no error in the project/JEMS).
4. If the MA/JS finds no technical error,[1] the application form will be opened for this modification by the MA/JS, and the Lead Partner can proceed with the minor modifications in JEMS.
5. After the modifications have been introduced by the project in JEMS, the MA/JS will conduct an administrative check (including documentation of findings) before **approving the new version of the application form.**

2.2. Minor modifications which require MA/JS approval

Some minor modifications of projects require the approval of the MA/JS. This is particularly the case when a new grant letter has to be issued.

Minor modifications which need to be approved by the MA/JS can be granted a maximum of two times per implementation year per operational project, unless otherwise exceptionally authorised by the MA/JS.

[1] If the MA/JS finds technical error (for instance if the category of modification is wrong or the request leads to technical issues), the Lead Partner will be informed about the necessary steps to proceed with the treatment of the request. This also applies to other categories of modification.

2.2.1. Minor modifications which require MA/JS approval can be (non-exhaustive list)

- Modifications within a partner budget, between cost categories, changes in the source of cofinancing, **at a constant ERDF budget at the project partner level** that does not fall under the flexibility rule[2] except for the reduction in the approved ERDF amount for one or more partners (without affecting the project's objectives, results, or reallocating the budget to other project partners);
- Modifications in indicator target values;
- A modification of actions/deliverables (without impact on the overall objective of the project);
- Administrative splits of partners, without touching any other budget and financing allocations;
- Partnership changes within entities belonging to the same legal group/holding within the programme area.
- Duration: any extension request if the project duration is below the maximum project duration specified in the relevant Call for Proposals.

2.2.2. General conditions for the request and process

1. The JS Project Manager must be consulted by the Lead Partner before any modification request.
2. The Lead Partner must submit in the JEMS a request using the template available which details the foreseen modifications (*Export > Export Plugin > Modification request MR)* and, if the request has a budget impact, a supporting budgetary table (For that, partner can use the 'standard budget export' plugin and highlight the budget modifications or another table showing clear budget impacts).
3. The MA/JS conducts technical control of the request (especially assessing if the modification instead requires Steering Committee approval and/or ensuring that it triggers no error in the project/JEMS).
4. If the MA/JS finds no technical error, the MA/JS conducts a qualitative assessment and decides on approval or rejection of the modification request (if needed, the MA/JS forwards questions to the Lead Partner with a response deadline).
5. If the qualitative assessment is positive, the application form will be opened for this modification by the MA/JS, and the Lead Partner can proceed with the modifications in JEMS.
6. After the modifications have been introduced by the project Lead Partner in the JEMS, the MA/JS will conduct an administrative check (including documentation of findings) before approving the new version of the application form.

[2] The flexibility rule is detailed in the Programme manual available on the Programme website and in the dedicated section in this document.

3. Major modifications

According to the Monitoring Committee's decision on 23rd November 2023, the Steering Committee has the task of selecting projects and, connected to this, assessing major modifications.

Major modifications to a project need to be evaluated by the Steering Committee and are limited to two modifications during the entire project and one modification per year unless otherwise exceptionally authorised by the MA/JS.

Any modification that does not fall under the above definitions of minor modifications is considered a major modification and therefore requires the approval of the Steering Committee and, due to their complexity, must be brought to the MA/JS's attention in advance.

3.1. Major modifications which require Steering Committee approval can be (non-exhaustive list)

- Financial: Modifications that impact partner(s) ERDF budget: may be altering the financial plan, moving ERDF funding between Project Partners, or adjusting the percentage of ERDF contribution.
- Content: A significant modification to the content of the project (a modification impacting the project's overall objective).
- Partnership, except changes within entities belonging to the same legal group/holding within the programme area.

3.2. General conditions for the request and process:

Major modifications are modifications that impact the core of the project and the initial basis on which the Steering Committee decided to allocate co-financing to the project. Consequently, a strict procedure has to be followed.

1. The JS Project Manager must be consulted by the Lead Partner before any modification request.
2. The Lead Partner must submit in the JEMS a request using the template available which details the foreseen modifications and (*Export > Export Plugin > Modification request MR*), if the request has a budget impact, a supporting budgetary table (*For that, use the 'standard budget export' plugin and highlight the budget modifications)* and all relevant supporting documents.
3. The MA/JS conducts technical control of the request (especially assessing if the modification effectively requires Steering Committee approval and/or ensuring that it triggers no error in the project/JEMS).
4. If the MA/JS finds no technical error, the MA/JS conducts a qualitative assessment and proposes approval or rejection of the modification request. Due to the nature of the modification, the Steering Committee is required to approve it. After receiving a major modification request, the MA/JS makes the request available to the Steering Committee members, along with its qualitative assessment. The Steering Committee members review the modification request.

5. Modification requests are submitted quarterly, in March, June, September, and December to the Steering Committee's approval. Any request is therefore put on the Steering Committee agenda if all relevant information is made available at least four weeks before the scheduled Steering Committee decision date. If no meeting of the Steering Committee is planned, major modification requests are submitted through a written procedure. Each year, an exact calendar is defined in advance, communicated to the Steering Committee members and published on the programme website. Any Steering Committee member has the right to request additional information. If additional questions arise, these are forwarded to the partnership, which will have a deadline to respond.
6. The Steering Committee decides whether to approve or reject the major modification request according to its rules of procedure.
7. If a major modification request is approved by the Steering Committee, the application form will be opened for this modification by the MA/JS and the Lead partner can proceed with the modifications in JEMS.
8. After the modifications have been introduced by the project Lead partner in JEMS, the MA/JS will conduct an administrative check (including documentation of findings) before approving the new version of the application form.

Please bear in mind that the approval of a major modification may take several weeks. Since these are substantial modifications to the project, they must be carefully considered and well-planned. Before submitting a major modification request to the programme, projects are required to exhaust all other options (as other types of modifications).

4. 💡 Different steps to follow in the monitoring system (JEMS)

Step 1 – Generate a modification request by the partnership

1) Generate an export of the modification request as a Word template document via *Export* > *Export Plugin* > *Modification request MR*
2) Click *Export*
3) Save the resulting Word document
4) Fill in the relevant sections
5) Optional: if the request has a budget impact, you must use the standard budget export to generate an Excel file for modifications impacting the budget.

Step 2 – Upload a modification request by the Lead Partner

1) Go to *Shared folder*
2) Click *Upload* file to upload the filled-in document(s), i.e. modification request + relevant annexes (including the standard budget table. For that, use the 'standard budget export' plugin from JEMS and highlight the budget modifications)
3) Send an email with your modification request to your assigned project manager with the document(s) as an attachment.

Steps 3, 4 & 5 – Technical check, content assessment and opening modification process by the MA/JS

1) The MA/JS undertakes a technical check of the request, assessing if the modification is in the good category and/or ensuring that it triggers no technical error in the project/system. The technical check is uploaded in Jems.
2) If the MA/JS finds no technical error, a qualitative analysis is conducted (except for minor modifications that do not require the MA/JS), and the MA/JS or Steering Committee decides on approval or rejection of the modification request. The content assessment is uploaded in Jems.
3) If the MA/JS or Steering Committee content assessment is positive and after being uploaded in the modification section in Jems, the project partners are informed that a new modification for the application is opened.

Step 6 – Proceed with the modification by the Lead Partner

1) Apply changes to the application form (in unlocked sections) that were requested in the modification request.
2) Re-submit the application form via Check & Submit.
3) Inform the project officer that the changes have been submitted.

Step 7 – final approval by the MA/JS

1) If the changes are in line with the submitted modification request, and no other issues are identified, the MA/JS approves the modification

5. Flexibility rule

The flexibility rule allows projects to overspend on cost category of the approved budget by up to 25%, **at the partner level**, without needing to submit a request for modification. Budget changes that fall under the flexibility rule do, therefore, not need to follow the programme project modification procedures (described above and detailed on the Programme website).

The overspending has to be counterbalanced through lower spending under other cost categories.

Limitations: The total budget (ERDF and public cofinancing) of a partner cannot be increased.

There is an optional maximum deviation of 25% per cost category at the project partner level. Partners can overspend per cost category, providing that all their activities are implemented and that each cost category budget at the partner level stays within the 25% flexibility described above (at the constant general budget level).

The partner is still committed to carrying out its project objectives as in the approved application form in terms of activities and results. The budget flexibility rule equips the partner with the possibility to handle with more flexibility the normal variations that occur between budget planning and actual costs for the implementation.

The MA/JS will ensure that the 25% limit at the partner level is not exceeded during the checks over the project reports. Any excessive amount, up to 25%, will be rejected. In that case, the partnership may still request a project modification.