



Minimum standards and Guiding principles for setting up a Network of National Focal Points

under the European Defence Fund (EDF-NFPs) running from 2021 to 2027

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1. CONTEXT

The EDF-NFPs consists of a network of individuals nominated by Member States and countries associated to the European Defence Fund (EDF) that are supported by national structures established under the responsibility and control of the Member States and Associated Countries. The Commission will facilitate the organisation of the network of EDF-NFPs, for example by organising regular meetings and trainings.

As highly professional support services, NFPs operating nationally, shall form an essential component of the EDF implementation by providing practical information and assistance on all aspects of participation in the EDF to all stakeholders concerned.

The EDF-NFP network builds on the model of networks of national contact for successive EU R&I Framework Programmes.

The functions to be undertaken by the NFP shall be in the mutual interest of the Commission (which is in charge of the implementation of the EDF programme), Member States and the (potential) applicants and participants to EDF actions.

In order to assist the implementation of the EDF, NFPs shall reach out, provide information and advice to (potential) applicants and participants throughout the EDF life cycle. NFPs support structures shall be located in Member States/Associated Countries, allowing for close collaboration and interaction with stakeholders. Moreover, NFPs shall provide information and support tailored to the needs of the stakeholders in their respective Member States and Associated Countries.

To promote equal and consistent support, this document provides a common reference for all NFPs.

2. KEY PRINCIPLES AND MINIMUM STANDARDS

To enhance the rollout and implementation of the EDF, it is essential to establish an NFP network that shall have a reach across all relevant National Authorities and national research and industrial stakeholders, in particular with focus on small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), to ensure that all relevant information regarding the EDF reaches all stakeholders in a timely manner. It is also important that the two-way communication between the Commission and the NFPs is efficient. As the EDF is a new EU funding programme, the initial approach is to implement a flexible structure that is adaptable and scalable in the coming years.

For the NFP network:

- a) The NFPs and their national support structures shall be established, supported and financed under the responsibility and control of the Member States and Associated Countries. While acknowledging different national circumstances, the relevant national authorities shall ensure compliance with these minimum standards and guiding principles, including sufficient administrative capacity and performance monitoring. The NFPs and their alternates designated by the Member States and Associated Countries shall act as an interlocutor with the Commission;

- b) Member States and Associated Countries may adapt and extend their national NFP support structures to national/regional¹ circumstances over time, in close coordination with the Commission;
- c) Strict/specific rules for ensuring confidentiality and for avoiding conflicts of interest shall be established, in accordance with applicable European and national law;
- d) Each Member State and Associated Country shall ensure that it offers a degree of protection of EU classified information equivalent to that provided by the security rules of the Council set out in Council Decision 2013/488/EU and Commission Decision 2015/444. Natural persons representing NFPs may handle classified information only where they are subject to national security regulations for the protection and handling of classified information or the Commission Rules on handling EUCI;
- e) The EUROPA portal (in particular its Funding & tender opportunities portal²) remains the European Commission primary source of information on the EDF. A dedicated web page/portal shall be established by the relevant national authority in every country in the national language(s). The portal shall include relevant EU visual identity, essential references, and clear links to all relevant national support services. The portal could provide an access point for all (potential) applicants and participants that want to know more about the opportunities offered by the EDF, including SMEs, and particularly those new to EU programmes. The Commission will ensure that EUROPA provides direct links to the national portals;
- f) The Commission shall facilitate the organisation and operation of the NFPs, provide coordination and initial and regular training, and help ensure an understanding of and compliance with the Minimum standards and Guiding principles;
- g) The Commission shall facilitate cooperation among the NFPs.

For each NFP:

- a) The work of NFPs shall comply with the principles of transparency and equal access to EDF calls for all (potential) applicants and participants;
- b) The work of NFPs shall be completely independent and not be partial to, or influenced by, the interests of individual stakeholders;
- c) NFPs shall be representatives of ministries of defence and subordinated agencies/structures, other relevant governmental bodies, research institutes, universities or business/industry associations;

¹ Including outermost regions, if applicable.

² <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/programmes/edf>.

- d) NFPs shall be supported by respective host organisations and by their National Authorities in terms of staff and equipment (e.g. IT) to a level commensurate with the scope of the mandate, and the size of their potential stakeholder group;
- e) The NFP shall be accessible by e-mail, phone and relevant e-working tools (e.g. Skype, Zoom, WebEx) during working hours, with appropriate back-up arrangements in case of absences (e.g. functional mailbox);
- f) Every NFP shall be fully aware of the funding opportunities provided by the EDF as well as the participation rules and the objectives of the EDF;
- g) In line with the collaborative nature of the EDF, NFPs shall participate actively in transnational networks and contribute to partnership and consortia building;
- h) NFPs shall guarantee timely circulation of relevant information to the stakeholders.

3. FUNCTIONS OF A NFP

3.1. Core Functions: Informing and awareness raising

- a) Circulating to (potential) applicants and participants general and specific documentation on the EDF, including on conditions for participation, on possibilities and conditions for submission of proposals;
- b) Organising information and promotional activities, in liaison with the Commission services when appropriate, such as info days, seminars, conferences, newsletters, brokerage events, fairs, etc.;
- c) Advising on administrative procedures, rules and application forms of the EDF and explaining the scope and the modalities of types of action foreseen in the EDF;
- d) Advising on national administrative procedures and conditions in order to support potential applicants and participants that need to fulfil certain requirements for funding, particularly security accreditations and clearances as well as action requiring specific supporting documents issued by national authorities (e.g. Letter of Intent).

3.2. Ancillary Functions

3.2.1. Assisting, advising and training

- a) Assisting in partner search/identification activities notably by using internet based tools, co-operation networks, Enterprise Europe Network partnership services for SMEs, etc.;
- b) Organising courses and training sessions (both physical and virtual) on EDF where appropriate, for intermediaries and information multipliers to ensure high quality of advice;
- c) Where appropriate, in association with the Commission and National Authorities, organising courses and training seminars for specific target groups on topics

specific to EDF (legal aspects, modalities for participation, research and innovation areas, and financial rules);

- d) Providing annual feedback to the National Authority and the Commission on the NFP network and its functionality. Participating in ‘Lessons Learned’ exercises on the functioning of the network.

3.2.2. *Signposting*

- a) Signposting to other business support network services potential participants who require assistance, for example on general EU matters or matters relating to internal market, technology transfer, intellectual property rights, standardization bodies, or regional development;
- b) Strengthening cooperation between NFPs and their national support structures within the network by promoting joint activities;
- c) Signposting to EU/national/regional funding services and programmes and to European Partnerships and programme level collaboration among research funders;
- d) Signposting to other services within the national administration potential participants who require assistance or specific information, for example on matters relating to security requirements, funding, technology transfer, intellectual property rights, export regulations, standardisation bodies, harmonised capability requirements, common technical specifications or intention to procure.

4. COOPERATION BETWEEN NFPs AND COMMISSION SERVICES

NFPs shall be EDF ambassadors and true and impartial partners of the Commission services. The NFPs shall be the main interface between the Commission and applicants. The direct contact between the Commission and the NFPs shall be ensured to facilitate a good communication and ensure standard high level of support to NFPs.

4.1. Main interactions

The Commission shall:

- a) Establish an efficient, up-to-date information channel (e.g. meetings, mailing lists, newsletters, webinars, alerts, newsfeed, CIRCABC) between the Commission, and the NFPs;
- b) Invite NFPs to:
 - 1) Regular NFP meetings at least twice a year³ (mixture of physical and on-line⁴ meetings to provide information and specific trainings if needed);

³ Depending on the foreseen calls for proposals and related needs.

⁴ Use of digital media (streaming of meetings and webinars).

- 2) Information and awareness events related to the EDF that are organised by the Commission services;
- c) Provide leaflets, brochures and other relevant information for further distribution by NFPs;
- d) Support NFPs during national info days and events when possible.

4.2. Practical modalities

The Commission shall:

- a) Nominate contact persons for NFPs in the Commission services;
- b) Establish and operate a NFP web area to supply information and as a discussion forum;
- c) Support collaboration through specific NFP networking projects to address and advise the respective communities better/more specifically;
- d) Reimburse costs related to participation to meetings organised by the Commission for one member or alternate per Member States and Associated Countries. The reimbursement of travel expenses (for all members), and subsistence expenses (for private-sector members) by the Commission shall be made in line with the Guiding Principles and the provisions of the Commission Decision of 5 December 2009 on rules on the reimbursement of expenses.

5. NOMINATION AND RECOGNITION PROCESS

Each Member State and Associated Country shall nominate one NFP and one alternate, and inform the Commission through their Permanent Representation or Mission to the EU. Any change of the NFP or alternate NFP nominated shall follow the same procedure. When nominating NFPs and alternates, it is important to avoid situations that could later give rise to potential conflicts of interest. Confirmation in writing that the NFPs and alternates have read and accepted these minimum standards, and in particular the sections on handling sensitive information and conflict of interest, must be included in their appointment letter and transmitted to the Commission by electronic means.

The Commission shall publish and regularly update the appointed NFPs on the EUROPA portal dedicated to EDF-NFPs⁵, and refer to it in the Guide for Applicants and in other information materials.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

National Authorities shall ensure that appropriate measures are in place in accordance with National law with regard to the handling of any sensitive information (e.g. the outcome of evaluations).

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/defence-industry-space/network-european-defence-fund-national-focal-points-nfp-0_en

7. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

- a. NFPs must be free from conflicts of interest between their NFP activities and other professional activities. In all circumstances, NFPs must act to avoid any real or perceived conflict of interest, and ensure that they provide equal treatment to all participants.

To be eligible for designation as NFP, each NFP shall declare whether it is in one of the situations referred to in Articles 136(1) and 141(1) of the Financial Regulation, and, where applicable, whether it has taken any remedial measures referred to in point (a) of the first subparagraph of Article 136(6).

Each NFP shall also declare whether the following persons or entities are in one of the exclusion situations referred to in points (c) to (h) of Article 136(1):

(a) natural or legal persons that are members of the administrative, management or supervisory body of the NFP or that have powers of representation, decision or control with regard to that participant;

(b) beneficial owners, as defined in point (6) of Article 3 of Directive (EU) 2015/849, of the NFP.

The NFP shall without delay inform the Commission of any changes in the situations as declared.

Where appropriate, the NFP shall provide the same declarations referred to in the first and second subparagraphs signed by a subcontractor or by any other entity on whose capacity it intends to rely, as the case may be.

- b. NFPs shall not be appointed as proposal evaluators or ‘observers’ in EDF proposal evaluations in relation to a work programme, or be, or seek to be, directly or indirectly involved in the evaluation process in any other way.
- c. NFPs may not participate, directly or indirectly, in a proposal or in a project in relation to a work programme, unless, in exceptional circumstances, the Commission explicitly allows such participation.
- d. If a host organisation does act as an applicant, mitigating measures shall be established within the institution (e.g. ‘firewalls’ between the departments involved in submitting proposals, and those responsible for the NFP function)⁶. In practice, if the NFP’s host organisation participates in a proposal or in a project in relation to a work programme, the host organisation must:
 - Put in place documented measures to ensure that its NFP does not receive confidential and privileged information from other NFPs;
 - Inform the Commission as soon as they start preparing the proposal (via written declaration) of its intended involvement, describing the mitigating measures within the institution, and confirming that the necessary measures are in place.

⁶ This is not applicable to calls for proposals targeted at NFPs themselves (e.g. transnational networks).

- e. NFPs may participate in an advisory or supporting role in a project, once grant preparation has started.

In case a NFP or a host organisation does not comply with the provisions of this section, it shall immediately withdraw from the proposal/action. Non-compliance may also lead to the consequences set in Articles 135, 136 and 141 of the Financial Regulation (e.g. exclusion or rejection of a person or entity from participating in an award procedure or in an application/action; application of a financial penalty).

Annex - Terminology

Commission services: European Commission.

Host organisation: The legal entity (ministries of defence and subordinated agencies/structures, other relevant governmental bodies, research institutes, universities or business/industry associations) to which a NFP is affiliated.

National Focal Point (NFP): Representative nominated by Member States/Associated Countries to participate in the NFP Network that are sponsored and supported by National Authorities.

National Authority/ies: The relevant government department(s) responsible for the national implementation of the European Defence Fund. NFP nominations are made officially on behalf of the National Authority.

Alternate NFP: Person nominated by Member State/Associated Country to act on behalf of NFP as necessary.