

CALL FOR PROPOSALS – SMALL GRANT SCHEME

INSTITUTIONAL COOPERATION BETWEEN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS, UPPER-SECONDARY SCHOOLS AND PRIVATE SECTOR

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, INNOVATION AND SMES PROGRAM NORWAY GRANTS 2014 – 2021

SLOVAKIA

1. BASIC DATA AND CONDITIONS

The objective of this Call is to strengthen institutional cooperation between higher education institutions, upper-secondary schools and enterprises in Slovakia and Norway to enhance both the quality and relevance of education and training in Slovakia, mainly in the focus areas of *Green Industry Innovation* and *Welfare and Ambient Assisted Living technologies*. The objective of the Program area “Education, Scholarships, Apprenticeships and Youth Entrepreneurship” is enhanced human capital and knowledge base in Slovakia.

Date of Call launching	30 November 2021
Date of Call closure:	28 February 2022, 23:59 CET
Call Code:	BIN SGS02
Program outcome:	Education and employment potential enhanced in Slovakia in Green Industry Innovation and Welfare and Ambient Assisted Living Technologies
Program output:	Institutional Cooperation Supported
Total allocation:	2 470 588 €
Maximum grant to be applied for:	EUR 200 000
Minimum grant to be applied for:	EUR 10 000
Co-financing:	The grant will cover up to 100% of eligible project expenses. Co-financing is not required.
Announced by:	Research Agency
Donor Program Partners (DPPs):	Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills/HK-dir (Norway) (<i>till 30 June 2021 known as Agency for International Cooperation and Quality Enhancement in Higher Education/DIKU</i>), National Agency of International Education Affairs (AIBA, Liechtenstein), Innovation Norway (IN, Norway)
Eligible applicants:	Higher education institutions (HEIs) ¹ and upper-secondary schools ² in Slovakia.
Eligible partners:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Higher education institutions, upper-secondary schools in Slovakia and Norway. Private enterprises established as legal persons in Slovakia or Norway are eligible partners, however they cannot receive any financial contribution from the programme.
Further conditions:	<p><u>Mandatory conditions:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The applicant shall select at least one indicator from outcome indicators and two indicators from output indicators listed in Article 2 of this Call. The applicant must have at least one and max. three partners. At least one project partner has to come from Norway.

¹ Higher education institution (in Slovakia) – legal person established according to Act No. 131/2002 and about modification and amendment of respective acts (§ 2, par. 2, a), b), c)).

² Upper-secondary school (in Slovakia) – legal person established according to Act No. 245/2008 on Upbringing and Education and about modification and amendment of respective acts (§ 32). The eligible applicants have to be enlisted in the official school registry of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Projects implementation shall not exceed 20 months and must be completed by latest 30 April 2024. <p><u>Mandatory attachments:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Signed Partnership statement (Annex III of this Call), letter of intent or other similar document proving the partner's interest in participating in the project. The document should be signed and submitted as a scanned version. Signed Declaration of the Applicant (Annex VI of the Call), Signed Declaration of the Partner³ (Annex VII of the Call)
Geographical area	All regions of the Slovak Republic are eligible.
Funding source(s):	Norwegian Financial Mechanism and State Budget of the Slovak Republic.

2. EXPECTATIONS AND RESULTS FRAMEWORK

Projects are expected to strengthen the bilateral cooperation between Slovakia and Norway on an institutional level mainly in the focus areas of *Green Industry Innovation* and *Welfare and Ambient Assisted Living technologies*. At a systemic level, the projects are expected to trigger modernization and reinforcement of the response of education and training to the main challenges of today's world (employment, economic stability and growth, as well as active participation in democratic life).

Projects at upper-secondary level can target Vocational education and training (VET) development and/or bridging the gap between the education system and labor market needs. Projects at higher education level can focus on building more intensive cooperation between SMEs/enterprises and educational institutions and support to career development of researchers.

Projects shall contribute to the Program's objective *Increased value creation and sustainable growth* and to Program Outcome 2 defined as *Education and employment potential enhanced in Slovakia in Green Industry Innovation and Welfare Technology and Ambient Assisted Living Technologies*. The project shall target the Program Output 2.2 defined as *Institutional Cooperation Supported*.

The applicants shall choose and set target values for **at least one indicator from outcome indicators and two indicators from output indicators from the list below:**

Outcome level:

- Number of new courses/modules offered in environmental technologies,
- Number of people who remain employed in the chosen sector after apprenticeships (data must be disaggregated by gender, level of education, sector),
- Percentage of participants who declare improved skills and competencies.

Output level:

- Number of apprentices supported in Slovakia within SMEs or other organizations/institutions (data must be disaggregated by gender),
- Number of SMEs and other enterprises engaged within your project in institutional cooperation at higher education level,
- Number of SMEs and other enterprises engaged within your project in institutional cooperation at upper secondary level.
- Number of new developed curricula related to Green Industry Innovation,
- Number of new developed curricula related to Welfare Technology and Ambient Assisted Living,

³ Relevant for partner/s with financial participation.

6. Number of institutions engaged in cooperation within the project at higher education,
7. Number of institutions engaged in cooperation within the project at upper secondary level,
8. Number of participants in workshops organized to share experiences regarding youth apprenticeships,
9. Number of participants in workshops organized to share experiences regarding new methods of education and engaging youth.

The full Results Framework of the Program is listed in the [Annex I to the Program Agreement](#) concluded between Slovakia and the Donor States. It is important to select indicators that are relevant with regard to the activities of the project, to Program focus areas and to set target values that are attainable.

3. ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES

There is a great flexibility in terms of the type of activities that institutional cooperation projects can implement, as long as the proposal demonstrates that these activities are appropriate in order to reach the objectives defined in the project and by the Program. Projects may focus on activities, such as:

- personalized learning, (based e.g. on artificial intelligence (AI), learning analytics, and other technologies) with a focus on supporting new, research-based pedagogical approaches for in-classroom education as well as distance and blended learning,
- skills development of learners and staff with a focus on, but not limited to, the development of STEM⁴, computational thinking and 21st century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, teamwork, communication,
- virtual or augmented reality (VR/AR) powered solutions to enrich learning experiences and innovate learning content generation,
- gamification, game-based learning applications and other solutions,
- support of synergies between research, education and the world of work,
- promotion of the development, testing and/or implementation of innovative practices in the fields of education and training (e.g. testing digital solutions for teaching and learning),
- integration of new technologies in education and training (new models of teaching/training) at all levels,
- engagement in curriculum development and development of joint Programs and degrees,
- development of strategic partnerships with private enterprises,
- development and support of quality dual learning, traineeships, apprenticeships and work placement systems,
- strengthening of cooperation between organizations with a view to facilitate knowledge exchanges and share innovative solutions for recruiting young people to studies, work or entrepreneurships (including public awareness-raising campaigns),
- set up of training courses for teachers and trainers, staff exchanges and job-shadowing,
- other similar type of activities.

All initiatives under this Call can take place in person as well as online.

The Program targets institutions; learners and staff of upper-secondary and higher education institutions (including young scientists).

⁴ Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) - is a broad term used to group together these academic disciplines. This term is typically used when addressing education policy and curriculum choices in schools to improve competitiveness in science and technology development.

4. ELIGIBLE EXPENDITURES

Except for the so-called “excluded expenditures” listed in Article 8.7 of the Regulation on the Implementation of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2014-2021 (the Regulation), all types of expenditures can be eligible, provided that they meet the conditions listed in this Call and in Article 8.2, 8.3, 8.5 and 8.9 of the Regulation.

In line with the Article 8.4 of the Regulation, the project grant may take the form of the standard scales of unit costs and this form may be used by both applicant and **partner/s**. Standard scales of unit costs may be used to cover travel costs and special needs support for participants with special needs as indicated in Annex 3 of the Guideline for Educational Programmes and in the Guideline for Applicant and Project Partner. The PO shall ensure that indirect costs are not eligible in conjunction with standard scales of unit costs where this would entail double financing (Annex 3 of the Guideline for Educational Programmes). Further description of financial provisions can be found in the Annex 3 of the Guideline for Educational Programmes, see [here](#).

The eligible direct expenditures for a project are those expenditures which are identified by the Project Promoter and/or the project partner, in accordance with their accounting principles and usual internal rules, as specific expenditures directly linked to the implementation of the project and which can therefore be booked to it directly. The following direct expenditures are eligible provided that they satisfy the criteria set out in Article 8.2 of the Regulation:

- a) the cost of staff assigned to the project, comprising actual salaries plus social security charges and other statutory costs included in the remuneration, provided that this corresponds to the Project Promoter’s and project partner’s usual policy on remuneration. The corresponding salary costs of staff of national administrations are eligible to the extent that they relate to the cost of activities which the relevant public authority would not carry out if the project concerned were not undertaken.
- b) travel and subsistence allowances for staff taking part in the project. Having regard to the principle of proportionality, travel costs, including subsistence allowance, may be calculated as a lump sum, on the basis of defined rules approved by the Program Operator,
- c) cost of new or second hand equipment. In case the Program Operator determines that the equipment is an integral and necessary component for achieving the outcomes of the project, the entire purchase price of that equipment may, by way of exception from the rule contained in paragraph 4 of Article 8.2, be eligible
- d) costs of consumables and supplies, provided that they are identifiable and assigned to the project,
- e) costs entailed by other contracts awarded by a Project Promoter for the purposes of carrying out the project, provided that the awarding complies with the applicable rules on public procurement and the Regulation,
- f) costs arising directly from requirements imposed by the project contract for each project.

Inclusion of an expenditure item in the project budget template approved by the PO cannot be considered as confirmation of eligibility of that expenditure item. The eligibility of expenditure will be demonstrated by the applicant at the time of implementation in accordance with the currently valid Guideline for Project Promoter and Project Partner.

Unless a later date is provided in the project contract, expenditures are eligible as of the date on which the Program Operator decides to award the project grant. The Program Operator shall in the same decision fix the final date of eligibility which shall be no later than either one year after the scheduled completion of the project or the date referred to in paragraph 3 Article 8.13 (currently 30 April 2024) of the Regulation, whichever is earlier.

Indirect costs are all eligible costs that cannot be identified by the Project Promoter and/or the project partner as being directly attributed to the project but which can be identified and justified by its accounting system as being incurred in direct relationship with the eligible direct costs attributed to the project. They may not include any eligible direct costs. Indirect costs of the project shall represent a fair apportionment of the overall overheads

of the Project Promoter or the project partner. Project promoters and project partners has to identify their indirect costs according to one of the methods listed in Article 8.5 of the Regulation.

For the purpose of this Call, equipment shall be considered costs of tangible and intangible assets (either a separate or a component of another recognized asset) or expensed in the hands of the Project Promoter according to the applicable accounting standards of the country where the applicant and/or project partner is established and according to generally accepted accounting principles. In case of an intangible asset and an exception from general rule in article 8.3.1. (c) of the Regulation is granted, and the asset will be exclusively used in the project, then the maintenance requirement will have to be complied with. If an intangible item is not classified as an asset, its costs may be still eligible as it falls under the scope of article 8.3.1. (e) of the Regulation.

No expenditures incurred before and after the dates set in the Grant Offer Letter shall be eligible. Project partners whose primary location is outside Slovakia, may opt to submit proof of expenditure by way of an independent audit report. For further information, see Article 8.12 of the Regulation.

The period of minimum post-completion operation of projects is three years after the PO's approval of project final report given that project outcomes and outputs are being used for the purpose of the project as described in the project contract. In case of Art 8.3. paragraph 2 of the Reg. is applied, based on Art. 8.14.2 the PO may change this period to five years.

Applicable national and European Union law on public procurement shall be complied with at any level in the implementation of projects. The highest ethical standards, as well as the avoidance of any conflict of interests, shall be observed during the procurement and execution of contracts. The procurement procedures should be in line with Article 8.15 of the Regulation.

5. RECOMMENDED MILESTONES AND TIME SCHEDULE

The Program Operator highly recommends that projects comply to the following time schedule:

Event/Milestone	Expected schedule
Call closure	28 February 2022
Project contract signing	August 2022
Completion of the project	30 April 2024

According to the time schedule above, the selection process will take approximately 5-6 months.

6. PARTNERSHIP

A partner is a legal entity actively involved in, and effectively contributing to, the implementation of a project. It shares with the applicant a common economic or social goal which is to be realized through the implementation of that project. In a working partnership, the project partner has its own budget and activities that is responsible to meet. However, it is important to emphasize that the applicant is responsible for all commitments and irregularities of the partner in relation to the Program Operator.

Partnership based on development of new practices and knowledge, exchange of experience and know-how, organization of stays, expert seminars, joint elaboration of studies and development of processes, etc. can be given as a suitable examples of partnership cooperation between institutions from Slovakia and Norway. Partnerships should not be formal or based only on service providing. No business relationship between the applicant and the partner within this Call is allowed. The project partner should actively contribute to project application development with clear description of its role during the project implementation.

The applicant shall submit either a **partnership statement** (Annex III of this Call), **letter of intent** or **other similar document** proving the partner's interest in participating in the project along with the Project Application. The document should be signed and submitted as a scanned version.

After the Project Application is approved, a draft **partnership agreement** shall be submitted. The draft agreement is subject to the Program Operator's review before it is concluded. **It is neither necessary nor recommended to enter into the partnership agreement before the project is approved!** Signed partnership statement, letter of intent or other similar document as stated above shall be seen as sufficient expression of interest to jointly implement the project.

The applicant must have at least one and max three partners. **At least one project partner has to come from Norway.**

Partnership with entities from Norway

One of the two main objectives of the Norway Grants is to support the cooperation with entities from Norway. When searching for a suitable partner in Norway, the applicant may use one of the following tools:

1. Sending an inquiry with short description of the project to norskegranty@vyskumnaagentura.sk, request will be shared with the Donor Program Partner Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills (HK-dir).
2. Contact HK-dir directly <https://diku.no/en/resources-and-tools/eea-and-norway-grants> and/or at eeanorwaygrants@hkdir.no.

The applicant can also apply for a contribution from the Fund for Bilateral Relations ([Call BIN BF02](#)) in order to cover costs connected with the search and establishment of a partnership between institutions from Norway and Slovakia. More information on this Call is published on the [Program Operator's website](#).

7. SELECTION PROCEDURES

The project evaluation and award of grants shall be in accordance with Article 7.4 of the Regulation.

The Program Operator shall be responsible for project evaluation and for the award of grants. The Program Operator shall establish a Selection Committee that shall recommend the projects to be funded within the Program. The Selection Committee shall consist of at least three persons possessing the relevant expertise. At least one of them shall be external to the Program Operator and its partners. The DPPs shall be voting member of the Selection Committee (for the Outcome 2 – HK-dir and/or AIBA). The FMO and representatives from the Donors, including Embassies, and the National Focal Point shall be invited to participate in the meetings of the Selection Committee as observers.

The Program Operator shall review the applications for compliance with administrative and eligibility criteria. If the applicant/partner does not meet criteria that mean the exclusion of the project application or fails to complete the missing documents or eliminate the deficiencies of the project application within the set deadline, the Program Operator will send the applicant a notification of the exclusion of the project application from further evaluation. The Applicant is entitled to request the Program Operator to review the notification of the exclusion of his/her application from further evaluation within the set deadline. The Program Operator shall examine the reasons given in the request for review of the notification and shall, no later than ten working days from the date of receipt of the request for review of the notification, issue a final decision, which shall inform the applicant.

Each project application that meets the administrative compliance and eligibility criteria shall be reviewed by two experts appointed by the Program Operator, who shall be impartial and independent of applicants, the Program Operator and the Selection Committee.

The experts shall separately score the project according to the selection criteria published with the Call for proposals. For the purposes of ranking the project applications, the average of the scores awarded by the experts

shall be used.⁵ If the difference between the scores given by the two experts is more than 30 % of the higher score, a third expert shall be commissioned by the Program Operator to score the project independently. In such case, the average score of the two closest scores shall be used for the ranking of the application.

The Program Operator shall provide the Selection Committee with a list of the ranked projects. The Selection Committee shall review the ranked list of projects. It may modify the ranking of the projects in justified cases. The justification for the modifications shall be detailed in the minutes of the meeting of the Selection Committee. If such a modification results in project's rejection, the affected applicant shall be informed in writing of the justification for the modification. The Selection Committee shall submit the list of recommended projects, together with a reserve list, to the Program Operator.

The Program Operator shall verify that the selection process has been conducted in accordance with the Regulation and that the recommendations from the Selection Committee comply with the rules and objectives of the Program. Following such verification, the Program Operator shall, based on the recommendation of the Selection Committee, make a decision on which projects shall be supported. Prior to making such decision, an on the spot visit may be carried out by the Program Operator when construction works or purchase of special equipment are foreseen in the project.

The Program Operator shall notify the applicants about the results of the selection process within a reasonable time and publicize the results.

Priority will be given to:

1. projects implemented in the less developed geographical areas⁶,
2. projects addressing gender disparities⁷ in education and training,
3. projects addressing inclusive education⁸.

The involvement of the above mentioned priority target groups in the project implementation and location of the project implementation will be reflected in the evaluation criteria. The selection criteria are listed in the Annex II of this Call.

8. FINANCING AND REPORTING

The payment of the Project Grant shall take the form of advance payment, interim payments and a final payment. The advance payment shall be calculated as a percentage of the total grant awarded to the project and its amount shall be set out in the Project Contract. The maximum level of advance payment and the total amount of interim payments shall be as follows:

Project Implementation Duration ⁹	Advance payment	1 st Interim Payment	2 nd Interim Payment	3 rd Interim Payment	4 th Interim Payment	Final Payment ¹⁰
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⁵ The maximum achievable total score is 100. The projects with less than 60 points (in average) will not be supported.

⁶ Less developed regions in SR where GDP per capita is less than 75% of the EU average (NUTS 2 regions), i.e. all regions in Slovakia except the Bratislava region.

⁷ Differences in women's and men's access to resources, status and well-being, which usually favor men and are often institutionalized through law, justice and social norms (European Institute for Gender Equality).

⁸ A process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion from education and from within education (UNICEF).

⁹ The project contract may set suspensive conditions related to advance, interim and /or final payments. In justified cases, at the Programme Operator's discretion, a project promoter may receive extraordinary payments to ensure sufficient funds for the projects during the implementation so as to avoid any liquidity problems, provided that the Programme Operator has sufficient capacity proceed with these payments.

¹⁰ Retention may be applied at the end of the implementation or pro rata from each advance and interim payments.

Less than 12 months	80%	10%	-	-	-	10%
More than or equal to 12 months	70%	20%	-	-	-	10%

The advance payment shall be paid following the signature of the Project Contract. Subsequent payments shall be paid after the approval of project interim reports. The final payment will be paid after approval of the final report. An advance payment, if any, of a percentage of the total grant amount shall be paid within 15 working days from the submission of a request or within the period set in the Project Contract. The interim payments shall be paid within one month after the approval of project interim reports.

Upon approval of the final project report a final balance payment, if applicable, shall be made within one month. The approval of project interim and final reports shall take place within three months from the submission of the required information.

9. STATE AID

The activities eligible under this Call will not be of **economic nature**, i.e. they do not consist of an offer of goods and/or services and will not have impact on competition. In view of the above, **the provision of state aid is not expected under this Call**. The applicant and the partner/s shall submit together with the Project application a Declaration (Annex VI and VII to the Call) declaring that the activities carried out under the project will not be considered as economic activities due to their nature.

The PO strongly recommends applicants to read carefully *Methodological guideline - Cases not subject to State aid rules* (in Slovak only, see Chapter 11 of this Call) issued by Antimonopoly Office of the Slovak Republic. The guideline explains what shall be understood as activities of non-economic nature and lists number of practical examples.

If the applicant (or partner, if relevant) is an organization carrying out economic activities, the organization shall ensure that the commercial and non-commercial activities shall be kept financially separated. The separation shall be proven by separate accounting. At the same time the organization shall ensure that all incomes related to the project outputs shall be re-used for financing of non-commercial activities.

Before approving a project application, the Program Operator will carry out a state aid test.

10. PROJECT APPLICATION SUBMISSION

The Project Application shall be prepared in English and submitted electronically via an application form accessible at vyskumnaagentura.egrant.sk by the date and time of the Call closure specified in Chapter 1 of this Call (Basic Data and Conditions).

The following mandatory attachments shall be submitted along with Project Application:

- Signed Partnership statement (Annex III of this Call), letter of intent or other similar document proving the partner's interest in participating in the project. The document should be signed and submitted as a scanned version.
- Signed Declaration of the Applicant (Annex VI of the Call),
- Signed Declaration of the Partner³ (Annex VII of the Call).

The date and time of the submission of the Project Application is identical to the date on and time of its receipt by the electronic application ([egrant](#)). Annexes to the Project Application should be submitted as PDF files to prevent accidental loss of data.

The Project Application does not need to be signed. Signature shall be required prior to the conclusion of the Project Contract.

11. FURTHER INFORMATION

Please note that all applicants are required to disclose any **consultant** (external or internal) involved in the preparation of the Project Application.

There is no legal entitlement to the Grant.

Link to the website of the National Focal Point with information on how to submit a complaint is at [complaints](#).

Project should also include information and communication activities in accordance with Annex 3 of the Regulation. Information related to communication activities is given in the Guideline for Applicant and Project Partner.

Before and during preparation of a Project Application the applicant is strongly advised to comply with the following documents, as amended:

- Guideline for Applicant and Project Partner,
- Guideline for Project Promoter,
- Project Contract template including attachments,
- Partnership Agreement template.

Further recommended documents:

- [Program Agreement for the financing of the Program “Business Development, Innovation and SMEs”](#),
- [Regulations on the implementation of Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2014 – 2021](#),
- [Guideline for Educational Programs](#),
- [Methodological guideline - Cases not subject to State aid rules](#) (in Slovak only)
- [Communication and Design Manual EEA and Norway Grants 2014-2021](#),
- Guidelines, instructions and other documents published by the Financial Mechanism Office, National Focal Point and Ministry of Finance of the SR (Certifying Authority). These documents are published on the <http://www.vyskumnaagentura.sk/en/programme-eea-norway-grants>, at www.eeagrants.sk and/or www.eeagrants.org

The Program Operator may also introduce the FAQ section, if relevant.

The PO is entitled to change the conditions of the Call or cancel the Call only after consultations with the Financial Mechanism Office and after the approval of the National Focal Point.

Applicants are recommended to follow the [website of the Program Operator](#), where updated information related to the announced Call will be published according to their relevance.

The Program Operator can be contacted for queries by:

- e-mail: norskegranty@vyskumnaagentura.sk (the request needs to be linked to the Call – by Call code BIN SGS02; questions received by e-mail will be responded within 10 working days);
- phone: +421 210 13 823 or mobile: +421 907487913.

12. CALL ANNEXES

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| Annex I | Project Application Form including budget template (only read in PDF sample) |
| Annex II | Selection Criteria |

Annex III	Partnership Statement
Annex IV	Selection Committee Statutes and Rules of Procedure
Annex V	Privacy Statement
Annex VI	Declaration of the Applicant
Annex VII	Declaration of the Partner