

PROPOSAL EVALUATION IN THE FIRST WOODWISDOM-NET PROGRAMME CALL:

SUB-CALL A: WOOD PRODUCTION AND PROPERTIES (BASIC RESEARCH)

SUB-CALL B: NEW WOOD-BASED PRODUCTS, EFFICIENT PROCESSES AND SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY (APPLIED AND INDUSTRIAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT)

The ERA-NET “Networking and Integration of National Programmes in the Area of Wood Material Science and Engineering (WoodWisdom-Net)” will issue its first Call for Proposals for Collaborative Research Projects on 1 November 2006. The Call Notice will be published at www.woodwisdom.net and respective sources of information. The Call for First-Step Proposals will close on 31 January 2007.

1 Background

WoodWisdom-Net is a network of funding organisations from European countries. The coordination of the network is supported by the European Commission under the ERA-NET scheme of the 6th Framework Programme to strengthen the European Research Area.

The aim of the WoodWisdom-Net project is to develop collaboration between the European forestry sector and forest-based industry, the wood material research community and funding organizations by integrating research resources in different countries. Promoting the development of innovative forest-based products, processes and services, the collaboration will benefit Europe's citizens and strengthen the competitiveness of Europe's forest sector and forest-based industry.

The objective of the call is to encourage and fund high-quality research within wood material science and engineering. It should stimulate trans-national cooperation, which shares expertise, synergies and cooperative research activities; increases efficient use of resources; supports development of scientific and technological knowledge base; builds synergies of knowledge exchange and technology transfer; provides long-term profitable and environmental friendly forestry management and forest production; provides raw material supply for specific products or demands and promotes the development of new wood-based products and efficient processes.

The network currently consists of eighteen funding organisations. Fifteen of these organisations (from 7 countries) will jointly provide funds in the order of up to 20 million euros to support the call. Each national funding organisation will only fund the project participants from its own country. Furthermore, not all funding organisations will support all of the thematic areas of the call; this may limit the range of topics available to applicants.



WoodWisdom-Net

Finland	Finnish Funding Agency for Technology and Innovation (Tekes)
Finland	Academy of Finland (AKA)
Finland	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry in Finland (MMM)
Sweden	Swedish Research Council for Environment, Agricultural Sciences and Spatial Planning (Formas)
Sweden	Swedish Governmental Agency for Innovation Systems (VINNOVA)
Denmark	Danish Forest and Nature Agency (DFNA)
Denmark	Danish Research Council for Technology and Production Sciences (FTP)
Germany	Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF)
Germany	Project Management Organisation Jülich (FZJ-PTJ)
Norway	Research Council Norway (RCN)
Norway	Innovation Norway (IN)
Nordic	Nordic Forest Research Cooperation Committee (SNS)
United Kingdom	Forestry Commission (FC)
France	Ministry of Agriculture/General Direction for Forest and Rural Affairs (MAAPR)
France	National Institute of Agronomical Research (INRA)

2 Call Structure

Within the themes of the Call collaborative research projects should be established by consortia of partners, demonstrating evidence of added value as exclusively enabled by the international collaboration. In other words, the projects will deliver results over and above the impact of non-collaborative projects funded by individual countries.

Funding will be available from national funding organisations (see participating organisations above) only for participants of the respective countries. Projects can be funded for a maximum of three years.

Structurally, the call will be divided into two sub-calls, Sub-Call A “Wood Production and Properties” (Basic research) and Sub-Call B “New Wood Based Products, Efficient Processes and Sustainable Forestry” (Applied and industrial research and development). This is in order to satisfy the diversity of priorities and strategic ambitions of the partner countries.

Sub-Call A is open to researchers/research groups at academic institutions and research institutions within the participating countries (private/industrial cooperation/co-funding allowed) and Sub-Call B is open to companies (focus on research-intensive small- and medium-sized enterprises and their strategic partnerships) and research organisations. **Each participant is subject to the national eligibility criteria.** If a proposal includes any participants from countries outside the WoodWisdom-Net partner countries, the participants from the non-WW-Net partner countries are required to finance their activities from other sources.

3 Applying and Evaluation

3.1 Applications

There will be a two-stage application procedure (First and Second-Step Proposals) and, accordingly, a two-stage evaluation procedure for Sub-Calls A and B. First-Step Proposals shall be submitted electronically to the WoodWisdom-Net Secretariat. Application forms will be available at www.woodwisdom.net. The application language is English.

Please see the application form for the required information.

3.2 SUB-CALL A: Evaluation of First-Step Proposals

The funding organisations will first check the eligibility of the First-Step Proposals and their suitability for national funding. Then the representatives of the participating WoodWisdom-Net funding organisations called Representatives Committee A, will evaluate the proposals. Each participating organisation will be asked to select suitable person/s to be their representative/s. The selected person/s shall be involved in the internal decision-making process of the organisation and have knowledge of the theme areas and objectives of the call.

First-Step Proposals shall be evaluated according to the following criteria:

- Suitability for national funding (yes or no)
- Relevance to the scope and objectives of the call (1...5)
- Quality of international cooperation (1...5)
- Degree of novelty of the research (1...5)
- Expertise of the consortium leader (1...5)

It is important to note that there are limitations with regard to what kind of research the different funding organisations can support. Therefore, the most important selection criteria at the first stage are the suitability for national funding and relevance to the scope and objectives of the call. Also the quality of international cooperation is emphasized.

The members of the Representatives Committee A will first check the proposals independently; later they will meet to rate the proposals. If necessary, additional expert opinions can be requested. The Representatives Committee A shall rate proposals using a specific scale for sub-criteria (5=Excellent, 4=Very good, 3=Good, 2=Fair, 1=Poor) and prepare a joint statement using a common evaluation form. The Representatives Committee A will give their rating and joint statements for Second-Step Proposals to the WoodWisdom-Net Steering Committee. WoodWisdom-Net Steering Committee will then make a decision on the Second-Step Proposals. First-Step Proposals will be ranked as pass/not pass. A written statement will be sent to the consortia leaders.

3.3 SUB-CALL A: Evaluation of Second-Step Proposals

Applicants who pass the initial evaluation will be requested to submit a Second-Step Proposal. Only invited Second-Step Proposals will be accepted. Second-Step Proposals will be peer-reviewed by an international expert panel. The international expert panel consists of esteemed researchers and/or

otherwise recognized experts of the field. Each proposal is sent to at least two panel members who are asked to prepare individual evaluation statements. In some cases, a proposal may be sent to a special expert who is not a member of the panel, but who can provide additional knowledge pertaining to a particular field.

Second-Step Proposals shall be evaluated according to the following criteria:

- Scientific quality and relevance
- Feasibility of the research plan
- Quality of the consortium
- Dissemination and applicability
- Societal, economic and environmental relevance
- Researcher training (PhD students included)

In addition to these criteria, the First-Step Proposal evaluation criteria are still valid. The applicants should also consider the national funding criteria.

All individual evaluation statements are made available to the panel members before the international expert panel meeting¹. The expert panel meeting will review all the applications assigned to it. Then the expert panel will prepare one joint evaluation statement for each proposal, based on the panel discussions and the individual evaluations. In addition to the written evaluations, the evaluators are asked to give a numerical rating for each criterion and also a numerical rating for each proposal. The following scale for sub-criteria shall be used: (5=Excellent, 4=Very good, 3=Good, 2=Fair, 1=Poor) and a common evaluation form shall be used at this stage too.

Then, the Steering Committee will do the final ranking and give recommendations for national funding decisions. The ranking and funding decisions shall be based mainly on the scientific ranking of expert panel evaluations but other science/technology policy-related factors of national funding organisations may also play a role in the decision-making process. National funding organisations make the final funding decisions.

3.4 SUB-CALL A: Nomination of Evaluators for Full Proposals

First-Step Proposals are evaluated internally within the project organisation as already stated above.

For the Second-Step Proposal evaluation there will be a panel of internationally recognized experts from the fields of the call themes. Depending on the nature of the proposals invited to the second step, the most suitable evaluators will be selected to participate in the evaluation. Each participating organisation will suggest a few evaluators, but there will be no country representation in the evaluator panel in the sense that each partner will be represented; the scientific expertise will be a

¹ Rebuttal: In consortia with Danish partners the individual evaluation statements will in anonymously form be sent to the applicants to comment after the experts have given their assessments on the proposals. The aim of the rebuttal step is the resolve potential uncertainties that may arise when reading the evaluation statements. The applicant will have the opportunity to respond briefly to the written evaluation statement within one week. Additional new or excessive information or changes to the original proposal will be disregarded in the further evaluation process. The comments of the applicants will be enclosed to the individual evaluation report and made available for the further evaluation process by the international expert panel etc.

priority. The Steering Committee appoints the members of the panel and the WoodWisdom-Net secretariat officially invites each of the experts to be an evaluator, explains the rules and sends a set of evaluation documents and any other useful documents. If evaluators accept the invitation, they send a signed confidentiality disclosure agreement to the WoodWisdom-Net Secretariat. As soon as the Steering Committee has decided from whom the full proposals will be requested, participating organisations will start searching for suitable evaluators.

3.5 SUB-CALL B: Evaluation of First-Step Proposals

First-Step Proposals shall be evaluated according to the following criteria:

- Suitability for national funding (yes or no)
- Relevance to the scope and objectives of the call (1...5)
- Quality of international cooperation (1...5)
- Innovativeness (1...5)
- Industrial relevance (1...5)

The participating funding organisations will first check the eligibility of the First-Step Proposals. It is important to note that there are differences between funding organisations on what kind of applied research and industrial development projects of research organisations and companies they can fund. Therefore, the most important selection criteria at the first stage are the suitability for national funding and relevance to the scope and objectives of the call. Also the quality of international cooperation is emphasized.

The organisations use their internal experts and, if necessary or if there are no internal experts available, additional expert opinions can also be requested. Each organisation will then send written comments using the common evaluation form. Each participating organisation will be requested to choose a suitable person/s to be their representative/s, and it depends on the organisation, whether they want their representative/s to be a substance or administrative expert/s. Each organisation can choose a maximum of two persons to the Representatives Committee B. The Representatives Committee B will then decide from whom the Second-Step Proposals will be requested.

First-Step Proposals will be ranked as pass/pass, but to be improved/not pass. A written statement will be sent to consortia leaders.

3.6 SUB-CALL B: Evaluation of Second-Step Proposals

Applicants who pass the first-step evaluation will be requested to submit a Second-Step Proposal. Only invited Second-Step Proposals will be accepted.

Second-Step Proposals shall be evaluated according to the following criteria:

- Feasibility of the research plan
- Quality of the consortium
- Scientific/technical quality of the proposal
- Dissemination and exploitability of results
- Potential to create new business opportunities in the sector
- Societal, industrial, economic and environmental relevance

In addition to these criteria the First-Step Proposal evaluation criteria are still valid. The applicants should also consider the national funding criteria.

The funding organisations will first go through the Second-Step Proposals and check the functionality of the consortia and conduct the evaluation of the national parts to check the suitability for national funding.

An expert panel will evaluate the common part of the proposals using a common evaluation form. The expert panel consists of recognized experts of the field. Each proposal is sent to at least three panel members who are asked to prepare preliminary evaluation statements. In some cases, a proposal may be sent to a special expert who is not a member of the panel but who can provide additional knowledge pertaining to a particular field. All preliminary evaluation statements are made available to the panel members before the panel meeting. The expert panel meeting will review all the research consortia applications assigned to it. Then the panel will prepare one joint evaluation statement for each proposal, based on the panel discussions and the preliminary evaluations. In addition to the written evaluations, the evaluators are asked to give a numerical rating for each criterion and also a numerical rating for each proposal. The following scale shall be used: (5=Excellent, 4=Very good, 3=Good, 2=Fair, 1=Poor). The expert panel will not evaluate funding applications of industrial partners.

After the expert panel has given its rating and suggestions on the proposals and the funding organisations have given their statements on suitability for national funding, the Representatives Committee B will rank the evaluated proposals and evaluate the company consortia applications. The Steering Committee decides on the final ranking and gives recommendations to the national funding organisations. The ranking and funding recommendations shall be based on the international expert panel evaluations, the reports of the national funding organisations and other science/technology policy-related factors. National funding organisations make the final funding decisions.

4 Evaluation Costs

The respective organisations in both Sub-Calls will share the external evaluation costs when they occur. Sharing costs is based on the country participation in the projects where external evaluation costs arise.

If the organisations use external evaluators in their internal evaluation processes, they will cover the costs themselves.

5 Confidentiality

Applications, project plans and any information related to them shall be kept confidential in accordance with the WoodWisdom-Net MoU and any applicable national legislation and not used to any other purpose than evaluation of the applications, making a funding decision and monitoring of the project. The members of evaluation panels shall be required to commit to this confidentiality obligation.

Consortia with Swedish partners need to be aware of the Swedish laws The Freedom of the Press Act (SFS 1949:105), The Secrecy Act (SFS 1980:100) and The Secrecy Ordinance (SFS 1980:657)

when including any confidential information into the joint project plan. This shall only apply to documents and information related to Swedish applicants.

Evaluators are not allowed to disclose to outsiders any information concerning application documents or evaluations, nor allowed to use this confidential information to their own benefit or anyone else's benefit or disadvantage. In addition, they may not reveal to outsiders that they are assessing the research plans of particular researchers. If evaluators are contacted by anyone who has questions about the application documents or evaluation statements, they should ask them to contact either the person's national funding organisation or the WoodWisdom-Net Secretariat.

Once the evaluation has been completed, it is required that all application documents and any copies made of them be destroyed, or returned to the WoodWisdom-Net Secretariat. Confidentiality must also be maintained after the evaluation process has been completed.

Due to the confidential nature of the projects including industrial partners, they are not evaluated by external evaluators. The internal confidentiality rules of the funding organisations apply when these projects are evaluated. For proposals with industrial partners in Sub-Call B, maximum confidentiality can be ensured through evaluation within and between the respective funding organisations. The national application parts with detailed company information will not be distributed.

6 Conflict of Interest

Evaluators are required to declare any personal interests according to the following criteria. Evaluators must disqualify themselves if they or a close person can in any way benefit or have a disadvantage from the approval or rejection of the proposal. They must also disqualify themselves in case they:

- Have close collaboration with the applicant (e.g. have co-authored and published an article with the applicant during the past three years, have been involved in the preparation of the application, or are involved in the publication or exploitation of the results)
- Have been a superior or subordinate or instructor of the applicant during the past three years
- Are currently applying for the same post as the applicant
- Are currently applying for funding from the same programme
- Are close competitors with the applicant in the research field
- Are close to the applicant. Here, a close person refers to:
 - o The evaluator's spouse (also de facto), child, grandchild, sibling, parent, grandparent or an otherwise especially close person (e.g. fiancé/e or close friend), as well as their spouses (also de facto),
 - o a sibling of the evaluator's parent or their spouses (also de facto), a child of the evaluator's sibling, the evaluator's previous spouse (also de facto)
 - o a child, grandchild, sibling, parent or grandparent of the evaluator's spouse as well as their spouses (also de facto), a child of a sibling of the spouse
 - o or a half-relative comparable to the above mentioned
- Or there exists an industrial conflict of interest

Evaluators are also disqualified if their impartiality may otherwise be endangered, or if they feel that they have a conflict of interest and are therefore disqualified from evaluating the application.