

National RTDI Programme 2004

Guide to the National RTDI Programme

▶ What is the National RTDI Programme?

The National RTDI Programme is aimed at stimulating and building a culture for sustained scientific research and innovation activity by providing financial support for scientific research, ranging from basic and applied research to near-to-market innovation.

The Programme seeks to encourage public-private sector partnerships and cross-sectoral synergies, by providing financial support for scientific research over the whole research and innovation chain. Potential participants of the Programme include SMEs, University, Public and Private Entities including Foundations and Authorities.

These objectives will be achieved through three sub-programmes – *Capacity Building*, *Scientific Research* and *SME Collaborative Research*.

The Programme has a budget of Lm300,000 for 2004, and is planned to fund between 8 and 12 competitive and scientifically relevant projects. The funds are to be allocated on the basis of a public call for proposals and an external peer review system. The call will be open to all legally established entities and government institutions in Malta, based on Maltese territory. Non-Maltese entities may also participate, but are not eligible for funding.

Projects in all scientific areas may be submitted for review.

Up to date information about the programme can be found at <http://www.mcst.org.mt/RTDI>.

▶ What kind of project can be funded?

The National RTDI Programme aims at supporting ongoing scientific research, as well as enabling scientific research by supporting capacity building and technological innovation with a strong element of R&D¹. The main requirements are research quality, novelty of the research and approach, and the potential for high impact. For 2004, the programme is open to proposals in all scientific areas.

Those intending to submit a proposal should consult the **Guidelines to Evaluators**, which gives an overview of the criteria which will be used by the reviewers. In all cases, the determining factor will be the quality of the science which will result as an output of the proposal. However, different types of projects, have other different objectives.

¹ Research and development (R&D) is defined as experimental or theoretical work undertaken primarily to acquire new knowledge, without any particular application or use in view; original investigation undertaken in order to acquire new knowledge, primarily directed towards a specific practical aim or objective; systematic work, drawing on existing knowledge gained from research and practical experience, that is directed to producing new materials, products and devices, to implementing new processes, systems and services, or to improving substantially those already produced or installed. Routine activities where there is no appreciable novelty or problem resolution are not considered to be R&D for the purposes of this proposal.

Capacity building proposals should clearly and concretely identify how the support will be used to enable new scientific research. Basic science proposals should, most importantly, identify how the project will push forward knowledge within the international scientific community. Innovation, and close-to-market projects should still identify the new science or technology they are proposing, but must also look at the impact of the new results, and the timescale of this impact.

▣ What are the sub-programmes available?

The National RTDI Programme offers three sub-programmes, each with specific criteria and objectives.

Sub-Programme I: Capacity-building Funding Scheme

This sub-programme is aimed at institution-driven projects with a view to developing the capacity for research and innovation within *Maltese academic institutions and other public bodies that have a research capacity or research remit*. The aim is to provide researchers with an appropriate support framework for carrying out high quality research and innovation and to gear up these institutions for effective exploitation of EU and other research opportunities. It is mainly aimed at supporting the upgrading of research facilities (project-linked) and access to scientific information services.

Projects funded under this sub-programme may address the development of collaborative, inter-departmental research and the exploitation of EU Programmes, bilateral S&T Agreements and other opportunities. Applications from clusters of consortia are encouraged.

Proposals must clearly indicate how the funds requested are to contribute to improve the scientific research and innovation capacity in Malta, and must be able to demonstrate their ability, in terms of competence and experience, to implement the proposed project. Eligible costs include, amongst others, purchase of equipment and access to scientific information sources including databases and publications.

Sub-Programme II: Scientific Research Funding Scheme

This sub-programme is aimed at supporting scientific and technological research that moves forward the frontiers of knowledge in areas of significance for development and innovation by supporting quality research. The primary focus is on supporting open-ended scientific research, including social science, engineering and medical research.

The Scheme is to be primarily researcher-driven with a view to supporting high quality science. The capacity to conduct scientific research is a necessary prerequisite to apply under this sub-programme.

The sub-programme will also consider small awards (excluding travel costs) enabling international collaboration and in particular the activation of bilateral S&T agreements, EU framework programme projects and other international collaboration.

Sub-Programme 3: SME Collaborative Research Funding Scheme

This sub-programme is aimed at improving the participation of SMEs in scientific research and technological development, thus driving innovation and competitiveness.

This sub-programme is open to proposals from SMEs, possibly in collaboration with RTD performers in the public and private sectors. Proposals involving clusters of SMEs aimed at developing common local research capabilities and competencies will be given particular consideration.

▶ **What funding is available?**

The National RTDI Programme has a budget of Lm300,000 for 2004 and it is anticipated to fund between 8 and 12 projects with a highly innovative and quality science content. The Programme will cover 75% of full costs for SMEs² and 100% for Maltese academic institutions³, public bodies and non-profit organizations. Costs will include personnel costs, operating expenditures, the purchase of small items of equipment, and dissemination costs. Overheads will be covered at 20% of direct costs, excluding subcontracting.

Each successful project will be split into a number of predefined (typically one year long) stages. At the beginning of each stage, the project coordinator will have access to the funds needed for the successful completion of that stage. At the end of each stage, a report on the progress of the project is to be submitted to the RTDI Programme Committee, to enable access to the funding for the following stage will be given. At the end of the project, an audited financial report of the project is to be submitted. Audit costs may *only* be covered as part of the overheads.

▶ **Who is eligible to participate?**

Any Maltese legal entity based on Maltese territory, and government institutions may participate in projects. Individuals may not participate directly in the programme, but must do so through an organisation. However, every participating legal entity must nominate a *primary investigator*, who will act as the main contact point with the organisation for any project related communication. The person will also be responsible for any project related reports during the running of the project.

Foreign entities are also eligible to participate in the programme, with the only constraint that every project must be coordinated by a Maltese legal entity. However, note that foreign entities are not eligible to funding from the programme.

▶ **What is the timeframe envisaged for the programme?**

The following are the dates of primary interest to submitters for the 2004 call for proposals of the National RTDI Programme:

29 March–16 April: Open call for Expressions of Interest.

3 May–25 June: Open call for proposals.

July–August: Proposal evaluation.

² Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are companies which (i) employ less than 250 employees *and* (ii) have an annual turnover which does not exceed Lm20 million or have an annual balance sheet total which does not exceed Lm17 million.

³ Public bodies refers to the civil service, public authorities and government owned non-profit oriented organisations.

September–October: Applicants with provisionally accepted proposals are notified and contracts negotiated.

October: All consortia notified of the outcome of the evaluation process.

October–November: Projects start date.

▶ **What are Expressions of Interest?**

Before launching the programme, the Malta Council for Science and Technology has opened a call for submissions of Expressions of Interest (Eoi). The aim of this invitation is to provide information to guide MCST in the organization of the Programme. Parties interested in participating in the programme are encouraged to fill in the Eoi form, providing a brief description of the project they envisage the possibility of proposing.

Note that evaluation of project proposals submitted to calls for proposals under the National RTDI Programme will be solely based on published criteria, including external peer review, and proposals submitted to this call for Expressions of Interest will not be given preference.

Submitted Expressions of Interest will be treated confidentially and will not be made public.

▶ **How do I submit a proposal?**

The call for project proposals for the RTDI Programme for 2004 is open between 3rd May 2004 and 25th June 2004. All proposals must be submitted by 17:00 local time 25th June 2004. Proposal forms are available from the RTDI Programme website <http://www.mcst.org.mt/RTDI>. A number of forms need to be filled to submit a proposal:

- **Form A1:** This form includes the details of the legal entity coordinating the proposed project, and the principal investigator with the organisation. One filled copy of this form has to be submitted with each proposal.
- **Form A2:** This form includes the details of any other organisation participating in the consortium of the proposed project. One filled copy of this form is to be submitted for each additional organisation (beyond the coordinating organisation) participating in the project.
- **Form B:** Basic details about the project are to be given in this form. This includes a short abstract of the proposed research. Since this may include sensitive information which the proposer would not like to make public, one can also include a second abstract with the sensitive information removed, and which can be made public, should the proposed project be accepted. This is the only information we will make public.
- **Proposal description:** Apart from the abovementioned forms, every proposal must include a detailed description of the proposed project. This is to include various aspects of the project, including the science behind it, a detailed workplan and a budget breakdown. More details about what must be included can be found in the **Guidelines to Submitting a Proposal** which can also be downloaded from the RTDI Programme website.

▶ **How will projects be evaluated?**

Proposal will be evaluated through an external peer review system. The proposals will be given a score on a number of predefined criteria:

- **Quality of science:** The primary aim of the National RTDI Programme is to encourage and promote scientific research and development, whether at a basic science level, or at an applied science and near-to-market stage, the primary measure of a good quality proposal is its scientific aspect. This score will reflect the impact of the proposal, from a pure science or innovation perspective.
- **Quality of development plan:** Clear objectives have to be backed up by a reasonable strategy in the form of the project's development plan. This score should reflect how effective the project workplan is expected to be, whether the allocated resources (the duration and budget requested) are realistic and, in the case of proposals with multiple participants, how well the different parties objectives and goals support each other in the proposed project timeline.
- **Capacity to achieve objectives:** It is important that the goals set in the proposal workplan can be achieved by the project consortium. Most importantly, the capacity to carry out the research and development proposed in the proposed project lifetime is expected to be successfully argued for in the proposal. This, together with the previous measure, should reflect the feasibility of the proposal.
- **Impact of project:** This score, the reviewer will assess the impact of funding, and successful completion of the project, both from a scientific perspective and in terms of improving potential research, development and innovation commercialization in the entities participating.
- **Overall:** The reviewer will give an overall score, indicating how the project works as a whole, how innovative the research and development proposed is, and how resource-effective the proposal is. In the case of proposals involving multiple partners, the score will also include a measure of the synergy within the consortium, including lack of duplication of roles.

A number of reviewers will be evaluating each proposal on the abovementioned criteria. Since the reviews will be done independently, a group of external evaluators will then meet to normalize the scores and give a final overall score to the proposal.

The comments given by the reviewers will be sent to the principal investigator at the coordinating organisation. The reviews will be kept anonymous, but the list of research bodies which will be nominating the reviewers will be published to ensure fairness and transparency.

More details about the evaluation process can be found in the **Guidelines to Evaluators** and **Evaluation Forms** documents available from the RTDI Programme website.

► **What is negotiated at the negotiation phase?**

Evaluators may identify parts of proposals which may need to be revised. This may include improving the proposed workplan, adding a new partner to the proposal, or improving the budget. Before a project starts, the organisations participating have to sign a contract in which the terms on which the grant will be used to complete a project will be stated. The RTDI Programme Committee reserves the right to insist that changes proposed by evaluators are adopted in the final proposal appearing with the signed contract for the project to be awarded.

▶ How does the funding of successful proposals work?

Successful projects will sign a contract outlining the deliverables and the terms of the funding. All projects will require annual reporting in order to track the progress of the award and to fulfill the conditions for payments. Project coordinators will be expected to furnish reasonable information to any future evaluation of the programme. This must include detailed accounting of project related costs.

The funding mechanism follows the annual reporting scheme, where the funds required for following year will be awarded in the beginning of each project year. At the end of the project, fully audited accounts of the project will have to be submitted to the RTDI Programme Committee. The costs of this audit may not be included in the costs of the project at the proposal stage, and can only be covered in the overheads.

In cases where the reporting identifies serious problems in implementation of the project or default in observation of deadlines relating to project deliverables, the RTDI Programme Management Committee reserves the right to discontinue the award. Organisations and individuals participating in such projects may be disqualified from future participation in the RTDI Programme.

▶ Where can I get more information?

The Malta Council for Science and Technology will be organising a number of information days to guide prospective proposal writers. However, note that MCST cannot give any help in proposal writing.

For more information about the programme, consult the website which can be found at <http://www.mcst.org.mt/RTDI>. Any questions can also be emailed to the National RTDI Programme helpdesk rtdi@mcst.org.mt, or by calling 2166 0341.

This document is only intended as an informal guide. Applicants should refer to the 'The 2004 National RTDI Programme Documentation' and the 'Guide for Submitting a Proposal'.