

Covid-19: How to facilitate bilateral matchmaking online?

Information to Programme Operators, Fund Operators and Donor Programme Partners

As most European countries have issued travel restrictions to contain the Covid-19 outbreak, many programmes experience challenges in their work with partnership facilitation. Although face-to-face matchmaking may be preferred, bilateral partnerships can also be developed online. This document gives an overview of some of the options, and is structured based on three basic steps in a matchmaking process:

- Finding a partner
- Organizing online webinars, information sessions or matchmaking seminars
- One-to-one meetings to develop a project application.

Step 1: Where to find partners?

The first step in a matchmaking process is searching for a potential partner. This is mostly done online. Partners can find each other through different sources:

- Several Donor Programme Partners (DPP) or donor contact points have **databases** to facilitate partner searches for EEA and Norway Grants projects. An overview of these can be found [here](#).
- For Programme Operators (PO), Fund Operators (FO) and DPPs which do not have databases, but wish to make partnership requests accessible online, an easy solution is to **publish incoming requests on the FO/PO's or DPP's webpage**. The webpage should be regularly updated and promoted through emails, websites and social media. An example of a webpage with expressions of interest in partnership cooperation from the Arts Council Norway can be seen [here](#).



The picture shows links to forms with Expression of interest in donor partnership from Polish cultural institutions.

- **Social media** can be used to facilitate partnerships. Promoters and partners can for example be invited to publish their project ideas or search for partners on the programme's Facebook page. An example from the Cultural Heritage call under the Estonian Local Development Programme can be found [here](#).

- Most of the DPPs and the POs/FOs have broad experience from **pre-matching and partnership facilitation based on email requests**. This work will be even more important to secure bilateral partnerships under the current circumstances. Pre-matching can be done in several ways, some examples follow below:
 - Based on incoming email requests, where the DPP and the PO/FO use their expertise on the sector to identify and match relevant partner organizations based on incoming partnership requests.
 - By launching a call for expression of interest. The PO/FO and the DPP can then gather all the replies in a document which can be shared among the interested parties and use this as a basis for pre-matching partners.
- [The Explorer](#) has been described as a “Tinder for green industry” and is a free matchmaking service to help Norwegian companies working on green industry and innovation to find international partners. The website is mostly relevant for the Innovation and Climate programmes.

We recommend using a template for expressing interest in bilateral partnerships, including basic information on the organization, the project idea, what kind of partner the organization is looking for, and the role foreseen for the partner in the project. An example from the Active Citizen Fund in Bulgaria can be found [here](#).

Step 2: Online information sessions and matchmaking seminars

Online tools can be used to facilitate partnerships or organize online matchmaking seminars. As some of these tools are expensive, we recommend that you verify with the providers that they are suitable for your use. It may also be worthwhile for the PO and the DPP to evaluate the interest in bilateral cooperation before investing in a matchmaking tool, as the circumstances may affect people’s availability.

The costs related to online matchmaking tools may be covered by the fund for bilateral relations allocated to the programmes, provided that they comply with the general rules on eligibility of expenditures set in Article 8.2 of the Regulation.

- In a project development process, it is an advantage that the promoter and the partner have the same basic information about the programme and the call. This can be secured by holding **information sessions and webinars on partnership opportunities online**, using tools such as [Adobe Connect](#), [Microsoft Teams](#), [Zoom](#) or other online conference tools. The participants can then follow up with individual meetings with the potential partners they have found through the sources suggested under *Step 1*.
- Several paid services offer the possibility of having a full **matchmaking seminar online**. The participants can register their profiles and interests on a website, take part in an online conference with plenary presentations, and book and hold one-to-one meetings with potential partners through the service.

Seminars and information sessions aimed at matchmaking should be organized well in advance of the deadline of the call.

Step 3: One-to-one meetings and project application development

Online meetings can be used both to meet potential partners and to discuss the project application, if the partners decide to develop a project together. A broad range of online meeting tools are easily accessible and can be a good alternative to face-to-face meetings when travelling is not possible. Examples are Skype, Facetime, [Zoom](#), [Microsoft Teams](#) etc.

Donor project partners should be included early in the project development process. We recommend using **the EEA and Norway Grants [Partnership Guide](#)** in your advisory work on bilateral cooperation.

For more information:

For more information, please contact Ellen Mauritzen, Senior Bilateral Officer, EEA and Norway Grants: ema2@efta.int. If you have experience with tools or models for online matchmaking which can be useful for other Programme Operators (PO), Fund Operators (FO) or Donor Programmer Partners (DPP), please share them with us.