OUTREACH CALL

Guidelines for Applicants

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1 Introduction

The PoliRuralPlus project, under the Horizon Europe framework, extends an invitation to submit proposals that advance rural-urban interactions across the European Union. This guide facilitates applicants in crafting and submitting their proposals.

Within the PoliRuralPlus project, a series of four open calls are anticipated. These calls are designed to attract and fund innovative proposals that align with the project's overarching aims. The primary objective of these calls is to extend the impact of the PoliRuralPlus initiative in enhancing rural attractiveness, fostering rural-urban integration and leveraging technological innovations for sustainable rural development.

This document provides guidelines for applicants for the first open call, hereinafter referred to as the call or the Outreach Call.

1.1 Objective of the Outreach Call

The main objective of the Outreach Call is to foster grassroots innovation in rural-urban interactions; to uncover and support unique ideas that redefine rural-urban interactions, demonstrating a deep dive into regional intricacies and fostering grassroots innovations.

Focused on exploring the unique dynamics between rural and urban areas, this call encourages stakeholders from 9 key EU regions to share innovative ideas. Selected initiatives, awarded a lump sum of 5,000 EUR, will foster regional innovation, leveraging local insights to strengthen rural-urban synergies.

1.2 Specific Objectives per Pilot Area

In line with the overarching objectives of the PoliRuralPlus project, nine distinct pilot areas have been identified to validate methodologies, enhance tools, and unearth practical policy innovations. These pilots serve as crucial testing grounds, where the project's outcomes can be applied and refined to address diverse regional challenges and opportunities.

Pilot 1, situated in Ireland's Monaghan County, aims to foster a vibrant and integrated Rural-Urban community by 2030. Through the "Rural and Urban Monaghan County Action Plan," the pilot endeavours to create an inclusive environment where all residents enjoy an enhanced quality of life while promoting innovation and prosperity.

Specific objectives to be addressed:
- Uncover pathways for enterprise development in the green economy
- Identifying emerging sectors and innovative practices in the green economy.
- Highlight opportunities for growth in the environmental sector.
- Inform strategies for promoting sustainable livelihoods and community development.
- Identification of social enterprise opportunities and support mechanisms, the research could strengthen the social enterprise sector.

Slovakia's pilot (Pilot 2), **covering the entire country**, focuses on envisioning more attractive rural areas, striving to revitalise Slovak rural regions through stakeholder engagement, political leadership, and capacity-building efforts. This pilot serves as a platform for inclusive consultations and decision-making processes, essential for shaping impactful policies.

Specific objectives to be addressed:

- Vision for more attractive rural areas
- Revitalization of Slovak rural areas
- Stakeholder engagement and capacity building
- Inclusive consultations and decision-making processes

Pilot 3, located in the region of Central Greece, is geared towards providing training in sustainable agritech technologies and promotional services for agritourism. By enhancing digital skills and promoting local agricultural products, this pilot aims to stimulate economic diversification and capitalise on the region's natural resources.

Specific objectives to be addressed:

- Training for sustainable agritech technologies
- Promotional services for agritourism
- Increase in digital skills among AKIS actors
- Diversification of agritourism opportunities and promotion of local agricultural products

Italian pilot (Pilot 4), situated in Apulia, emphasises the establishment of short food supply chains to strengthen connections between rural and urban areas. By promoting healthy diets and rural lifestyles, this initiative aims to foster synergies and attract urban dwellers to rural communities.

Specific objectives to be addressed:

- Establishment of short food supply chains
- Promotion of healthy diets and rural lifestyles
- Creation of direct linkages between rural and urban citizens
- Attraction of urban dwellers to rural areas

Pilot 5 in Finland, situated in the Mallusjoki rural district, aims to build a Rural Event Industry Ecosystem, fostering community engagement, cooperation, and economic opportunities through rural events. By leveraging the region's natural assets and creative sector, this pilot seeks to attract visitors from urban areas and stimulate rural development.

Specific objectives to be addressed:

- Building the Rural Event Industry Ecosystem
- Community engagement and cooperation
- Economic opportunities through rural events
- Attraction of urban visitors to rural areas

Pilot 6, the Bavaria-Czechia rural innovation network, defined by the Bohemian Forest (Šumava and Bayerischer Wald) and surrounding areas, aims to enhance connectivity, innovation, and social capital across rural and urban areas. By establishing incubators and fostering cultural connections, this pilot strives to create a conducive environment for rural startups and strengthen territorial identity.

Specific objectives to be addressed:

- Establishment of the Bavaria-Czechia Rural Innovation Network
- Improvement of connections and strategies for synergistic development
- Enhancement of business and innovation opportunities

- Strengthening of social connectivity and territorial identity

Spanish pilot (Pilot 7), situated in Segobriga and region of Sierra y Mancha Conquense, centres on rural-urban synergies and cultural heritage, leveraging the Segobriga Archaeological Park as a focal point for community collaboration and economic development. This initiative aims to attract visitors, foster local entrepreneurship, and bridge the gap between rural and urban areas.

Specific objectives to be addressed:
- Promotion of rural-urban synergies and cultural heritage
- Utilisation of the Segobriga Archaeological Park as a focal point
- Economic development through community collaboration
- Bridging the gap between rural and urban areas

Pilot 8 in Latvia's Vidzeme Planning Region is a public regional development institution. Its mission is to coordinate and promote long-term and well-balanced development of the region, which is guided by the VPR Development Programme (DP). So far there are no systematic mechanisms to monitor progress of VPR DP on a territorial level, and so far, it is monitored only on an organization level. It is very important that each goal and planned activities of a VPR DP responds directly to needs of inhabitants and where possible actively involve them into the action. Therefore, a transparent, reliable system for collecting, aggregating and communicating regional development progress to the public is a necessity. The establishment of a unified monitoring framework in the Vidzeme planning region as a territory is very important in order to ensure a successful development management process and feedback to each of the parties involved in the implementation of the VPR Development Programme, thus also promoting the interest and involvement of each resident of the region in the development of their place, region and Vidzeme region as a whole.

Topics to be addressed:
- Exploring/understanding mechanisms for developing sustainable and resilient rural economies in the Vidzeme region
- Strengthening capacity for monitoring of regional/territorial effects of the production of high-added value products and services within smart specialisation areas of the Vidzeme region
- More effective and inclusive governance mechanisms for rural and urban stakeholders in the Vidzeme region
- Tools to increase take-up of innovation support instruments by businesses in the region

Pilot 9 in Malta targets digital transformation and entrepreneurial capacity building in rural areas, aiming to level up agricultural sectors through digitization and youth empowerment. By fostering collaboration between rural and urban stakeholders, this pilot endeavours to bridge societal divides and promote circularity.

Specific objectives to be addressed:
- Digital transformation and entrepreneurial capacity building in rural areas
- Levelling up of agricultural sectors through digitization
- Empowerment of youth and promotion of circularity
- Bridging societal divides between rural and urban areas

1.3 Expected Results of the Outreach Call

The expected results of the Outreach Call include:

- Funding of the most promising project from each region with a lump sum of 5,000 EUR to stimulate regional innovation and the development of grassroots initiatives.
- Generation and support of innovative ideas aimed at redefining rural-urban interactions, gathered from workshops across key EU regions.
- Extending the PoliRuralPlus stakeholder database.
- Collect and describe a set of innovative ideas supporting the call objective.

1.4 Scope of Work

Projects will be instrumental in broadening the scope of regional pilot activities through stakeholder engagement. The work is segmented into a three-month period, focusing on:

1. **Month 1:** Establishing a stakeholder group and creating a GDPR-compliant stakeholder database.
2. **Month 2:** Gathering local needs and innovative ideas for solutions through stakeholder interactions.
3. **Month 3:** Producing obligatory deliverables as outlined in Chapter 4.

2 Eligibility Criteria

To ensure the integrity and impact of the PoliRuralPlus project, applicants must meet the following criteria:

1. **Type of organisation:** Any type of organisation can apply for the Outreach Call funding as long as they have the operational and financial capacity to carry out the tasks that they propose.
2. **Single applicants:** Only single organisations are eligible to apply. Consortia or joint submissions are not permitted for this call.
3. **Eligible countries:** Applicants must be legally established in an EU Member State or an Associated Country as outlined by the Horizon Europe rules.
4. **One proposal per applicant:** Only one proposal will be accepted for funding per applicant. In the case of multiple submissions, only the last one received (timestamp of the system) will enter into the evaluation process, the rest being declared as non-eligible.
5. **Declaration of honour:** Applicants must declare their eligibility and no conflict of interest in the online application.
6. **Pilot specific proposals:** The proposal must address specific challenges and opportunities identified within one of the 9 designated pilot regions of the PoliRuralPlus project (Section 1.2).
7. **Language:** English is the official language for PoliRuralPlus open calls. Submissions and deliverables done in any other language will not be evaluated. Any supporting documents

requested at the time of proposal submission must also be in English, except the document proving the legal status of the organisation.

8. **GDPR compliance:** Any project involving personal data must adhere to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) to ensure data privacy and protection.

9. **Non-beneficiary clause:** Organisations currently receiving funding or classified as beneficiaries under the PoliRuralPlus project are ineligible.

10. **Deliverable obligations:** Applicants commit to produce obligatory deliverables as outlined in Chapter 4.

3 Submission Process

Proposal submissions are solely via the online form on the PoliRuralPlus Knowledge Hub available at https://www.poliruralplus.eu/open-calls/.

Upon submission, applicants will receive a confirmation email, ensuring that their proposal has been successfully received.

The proposal contains two parts:

- **Part A: Administrative Form** - This section is designed to collect essential information about your organisation and designated contacts for technical and contractual matters. Please provide accurate and complete details to facilitate smooth communication throughout the application and project implementation process.
- **Part B: Technical Description** - Part B of the proposal is the narrative part that includes three sections that each correspond to an evaluation criterion. Part B needs to be uploaded as a PDF document following the template provided as part of the open call documents. Part B includes the proposed budget and its justification.

It is highly recommended to submit your proposal application well before the deadline. If the applicant discovers an error in the already submitted application, and provided the call deadline has not passed, the applicant may resubmit the application. Only the latest submitted version (timestamp of the system) will be considered as eligible.

4 Obligatory Deliverables

The selected applicants will commit to provide the following set of deliverables which will serve as a criterion for evaluation of sub-project implementation:

1. **Database of Stakeholders:** An accurately maintained, GDPR-compliant record of all stakeholders involved. A template for data collection will be provided.

2. **Blog post(s):** A contribution to the PoliRuralPlus blog available at the PoliRuralPlus Knowledge Hub.

3. **User Needs and Innovation Solutions Report:** A detailed document outlining the needs identified through stakeholder consultations. A template for this deliverable will be provided.

5 Proposal Evaluation

For evaluating proposals submitted under the Outreach Call, a detailed evaluation framework is needed to ensure transparency and fairness in the selection process. The framework will assess proposals based on their alignment with objectives and expected impacts, using a scoring system from 0 to 5, where 5 represents the highest level of excellence.

5.1 Evaluation Criteria

5.1.1 Objectives (0-5 points)

- **Linkage with regional specific objectives:** Evaluate how well the proposal's objectives align with the specific objectives identified in the selected pilot region (Section 1.2).
- **Extension of these objectives:** Assesses the proposal's ability to build upon or enhance existing regional specific objectives with innovative or expanded approaches.
- **Clarity, feasibility, and appropriateness of the proposed approach** for identifying, recruiting, and engaging stakeholders, including selection criteria, communication channels, and collaboration tools.
- **Clarity and soundness of proposed methodologies** for collecting, analysing, and synthesising user needs, including specific techniques, inclusivity strategies, and plans to address potential challenges.

5.1.2 Impacts (0-5 points)

- **Level of KPIs:** Considers the specificity and ambition of the proposed Key Performance Indicators related to stakeholder engagement and sectoral impacts.
- **Selected stakeholders:** Evaluates the diversity and relevance of the targeted stakeholder groups, emphasising engagement breadth and depth.
- **Covered sectors:** Reviews the range of sectors the proposal aims to impact, looking for a comprehensive approach that addresses multiple areas of regional development.
- **Impact on the region:** Assesses the potential long-term benefits to the pilot region, including economic growth, social inclusion, environmental sustainability, and overall enhancement of rural-urban interactions.

5.1.3 Implementation (0-5 points)

- **Financial plan:** The credibility and justification of the proposed budget and the level of the organisation's own contribution.

5.2 Proposal Scoring

- Evaluation scores are awarded for the criteria, and not for the different aspects in each criterion.
- The evaluators provide a score in the range from 0-5 to each criterion based on their textual comments.

- The whole range of scores should be used with steps of 0.5.
- Interpretation of scores:
  - **0** - The proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information.
  - **1 - Poor.** The criterion is inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.
  - **2 - Fair.** The proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses.
  - **3 - Good.** The proposal addresses the criterion well, but a number of shortcomings are present.
  - **4 - Very Good.** The proposal addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present.
  - **5 - Excellent.** The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.
- Definitions for score descriptors:
  - A '**minor shortcoming**' is an issue that relates only to a marginal aspect of the proposal with respect to the criterion and/or can easily be rectified (it will not impact the scoring).
  - A '**shortcoming**' is a problem that relates to an important aspect of the proposal. It impacts the scoring but does not render the proposal inappropriate for funding, i.e. the proposal is still expected to lead to useful results with positive impact.
  - A '**significant weakness**' means that the proposal addresses the criterion in a limited and/or not sufficiently effective way (will lower the score below threshold). This can also be the case when the proposal includes a large number of shortcomings, each one of them not rendering the proposal inappropriate for funding, though all together make the proposal not addressing the criterion sufficiently in an effective way.

5.3 Evaluation and Selection Process

- In order to ensure an unbiased evaluation process, proposals will be assessed by a panel of independent experts.
- Each proposal will be evaluated based on three main criteria: **Objectives, Impacts and Implementation**, with a scoring range from 0 (lowest) to 5 (highest) for each criterion.
- Proposals must achieve a minimum score of 3 in all three criteria and an overall score of at least 11 to be considered for funding.
- Priority will be given to selecting one proposal per pilot region. If no proposals qualify in a specific region, the option to select two proposals from another region will be considered.
- **Impact KPIs as tiebreaker:** In the event of equal overall scores within a region, the proposal with higher Impact KPIs will be selected to ensure that the most potentially transformative project is chosen.

6 Financial Support

6.1 Origin of the Funds

Selected beneficiaries will sign a dedicated Sub-Grant Agreement with the PoliRuralPlus project coordinator (CVUT). A Model Sub-Grant Agreement is part of the open call documents and will be published by 23 June 2024. The funds attached to the Sub-Grant Agreement come directly from the funds of the European Project PoliRuralPlus, and the PoliRuralPlus coordinator is managing the funds according to the Grant Agreement No 101136910 signed with the European Commission.

6.2 Use of the Financial Contribution

Each beneficiary commits to a proper use of the funding received, for the purposes of carrying out the sub-project in compliance with the defined work plan and expected deliverables. While no financial reporting will be requested within the experiment, teams must ensure that funds are properly spent. See the Model Sub-Grant Agreement for further details.

6.3 Funding Principle

Successful applicants will receive financial support from the PoliRuralPlus project in the amount of up to 5,000 EUR for the sub-project implementation. This will be provided as a lump sum contribution. Proposals requesting higher amounts will be considered as ineligible.

In total 45,000 EUR were allocated for the Outreach Call. It is expected to fund 9 sub-projects with a priority of one sub-project per pilot region.

Receiving a grant from the Outreach Call does not preclude participation in further PoliRuralPlus calls for proposals. The maximum support for one organisation across all calls is 60,000 EUR.

Please note that subcontracting or transfer of financial contribution to third parties is not permitted.

The financial contribution of up to 5,000 EUR will be distributed after successful implementation of the sub-project, given that all sub-project activities and deliverables (Chapter 4) are accepted.

7 Key Dates

- **Call opening:** 3 June 2024
- **Proposal submission opening:** 24 June 2024
- **Submission Deadline:** 31 July 2024, 17:00 CEST
- **Expected notification of results:** 6 September 2024
- **Signature of Sub-Grant Agreement:** September 2024
- **Expected implementation period:** October - December 2024

8 Processing of Personal Data

8.1 Processing of Personal Data by the PoliRuralPlus Coordinator

The personal data provided by the Applicants in the Outreach Call will be controlled by the PoliRuralPlus coordinator (Czech Technical University in Prague) and controlled by Plan4all z.s., one of the PoliRuralPlus partners. The collected data will be handled according to the GDPR. Personal data will be processed exclusively for the purposes of performing, managing and monitoring the application or protecting the financial interests of the EU (including checks, reviews audits and investigations). Personal data may be disclosed only to the external evaluators who evaluate their proposals and to the European Commission. The personal data will be kept for as long as it is necessary to process the application and its participation in the PolIRuralPlus project.

8.2 Processing of Personal Data by the Funded Sub-Projects

The selected sub-projects must put in place appropriate technical and organisational security measures to address data processing risks and in particular:
- prevent any unauthorised person from accessing computer systems that process personal data;
- ensure that access to personal data is limited to persons with special access rights;
- ensure that, during communication of personal data and transport of storage media, the data cannot be read, copied or deleted without authorisation;
- design its organisational structure in a way that meets data protection requirements.

9 Updates, Assistance and Consultancy

For additional support, including consultancy on proposal preparation, applicants are encouraged to contact the designated contact points for each pilot region, whose details can be found on the PoliRuralPlus Knowledge Hub. For any other questions, please use the primary contact details for this call.

Disclaimer: Applicants are advised to regularly check the PoliRuralPlus Knowledge Hub for the latest information and updates regarding the open call. PoliRuralPlus reserves the right to make any updates to the open call at any time without prior notice.

10 Conclusion

Your participation in the PoliRuralPlus Outreach Call contributes to the overarching goal of enhancing rural-urban interactions across the EU. We look forward to innovative proposals that promise significant regional impacts.