

**PROVISIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING THE
"ERA-NET SCHEME"**

**SUPPORTING THE COOPERATION AND
COORDINATION OF RESEARCH ACTIVITIES
CARRIED OUT AT NATIONAL OR REGIONAL
LEVEL**

Background document

This document is a practical guide on the provisions for implementing the cooperation and coordination of research activities carried out at national or regional level in the Sixth Framework Programme.

It is available on the DG Research web-site:

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/fp6/era-net.html>

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European Commission**

29 April 2003

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Standard Disclaimer

This document expresses solely the current views of Research Directorate of the European Commission. Readers should not regard these views as a statement of the official position of the European Commission.

This document is a practical guide to the "ERA-NET" scheme of the Sixth Framework Programme. As the principles underpinning the scheme evolve, the document will be updated.

The “ERA-NET” Scheme

The purpose of this note is to provide information on the ERA-NET scheme, which will be the principal means for the Sixth Framework Programme (FP6) to support the cooperation and coordination of research activities carried out at national or regional level. The scheme will be financed through part II of the specific programme “Integrating and strengthening the European Research Area”. An indicative budget of 24 M€ will be available in 2003 to support the scheme.

1 GENERAL ASPECTS

1.1 Objective

The objective of the ERA-NET scheme is to step up the cooperation and coordination of research activities carried out at national or regional level in the Member States and Associated States through:

- the networking of research activities conducted at national or regional level,
- the mutual opening of national and regional research programmes, which will be part of the networking activities.

The scheme will contribute to making a reality of the European Research Area by improving the coherence and coordination across Europe of such research programmes. It will be complementary to other frameworks of research cooperation such as COST and EUREKA.

The scheme will also enable national systems to take on tasks collectively that they would not have been able to tackle independently.

National systems will especially benefit from this scheme in terms of exchange of information and good practices, in terms of exchange of strategic ideas concerning national research planning and in terms of quality, in particular quality of evaluation and quality of training. This scheme will also allow to avoid duplication and to develop complementarities between different national research systems.

Both networking and mutual opening require a progressive approach. The ERA-NET scheme therefore has a long term perspective that must also allow for the different way that research is organised in different Member States.

1.2 Definition of research activities carried out at national or regional level

"Research activities" carried out at national or regional level should be understood either as full research and innovation programmes, or parts of such programmes or similar initiatives. Such activities should have the following characteristics:

- a) strategically planned and executed at national or regional level;
- b) financed or managed by national or regional public bodies or structures closely related to or mandated by public authorities.

1.3 Fields of research

The ERA-NET scheme will be implemented through a bottom-up approach in the sense of giving no preference to one specific research topic over another. Coordination activities under this scheme may be carried out in the **whole field of science and technology**, including the social and human sciences¹.

2 TYPES OF INSTRUMENTS TO BE USED

Coordination actions and specific support actions, two instruments of the Sixth Framework Programme will be used to implement the ERA-NET scheme.

- *Coordination actions (CAs)* are intended to be used for implementing ERA-NET proposals. The financial support from the Community will be limited to the costs of the additional activities undertaken to implement the ERA-NET. No support will be provided for the research activities themselves, for which the members of the ERA-NET will be expected to use their own resources. Community funding for an ERA-NET could be as high as 3 M€. In exceptional cases, for example if several fields of research are covered by a single ERA-NET, a greater contribution could be envisaged. Each ERA-NET should last sufficiently long to have a durable impact on the research programmes involved. Duration of up to 5 years may be envisaged.
- *Specific support actions (SSAs)* will be used to support preparatory actions aimed at developing future ERA-NET proposals. In particular, they may be used to set up fora aimed at strengthening cooperation at a strategic level between managers of major national research organisations.

¹ The specific programme "Integrating and strengthening the European Research Area" gives the following examples of topics that could be supported :

- health: health of key population groups; major diseases and disorders (e.g. cancer, diabetes and diabetes-related diseases, degenerative diseases of the nervous system, psychiatric diseases, cardiovascular diseases, hepatitis, allergies, visual impairment, infectious diseases), rare diseases; alternative or non-conventional medicine; and major diseases linked to poverty in developing countries; palliative care; activities involved will be implemented, for instance, through coordination of research and comparative studies, development of European databases and interdisciplinary networks, exchange of clinical practice and coordination of clinical trials.
- biotechnology: non-health and non-food applications.
- environment: urban environment (including sustainable urban development and cultural heritage, including, for example, ecosite concepts); marine environment and land/soil management; seismic risk.
- energy: new generation power plants ("near-zero-emission"), energy storage, transport and distribution.

Specific support actions should have a limited scope and may involve conferences, seminars, studies and analyses, working groups and expert groups, operational support and dissemination, information and communication activities, or a combination of these, as appropriate in each case. Community funding could be as high as 200,000€ for a duration of one year and will exceed 200,000 € only in exceptional cases.

3 PARTICIPANTS

3.1 Typology

For the minimum number of participants in ERA-NETs (Co-ordination actions) participants must be from the following three categories:

- Public bodies responsible for financing or managing research activities carried out at national or regional level e.g. ministries, state committees for research, academies, agencies, funding agencies or national research organizations;
- Other national bodies that finance or manage such research activities such as agencies established by governments under private law with a public service mission
- Bodies operating at European level that include the pan-European co-ordination of nationally-funded research as part of their mission.

In addition to these, and only beyond the minimum number of 3 participants, other legal entities such as charities or other private organisations which also manage research programmes that are strategically planned and executed at national or regional level may participate.

3.2 Number of participants

Coordination actions

For ERA-NET coordination actions, the minimum number of participants has been set at three independent legal entities managing publicly funded national or regional programmes, established in different Member States or Associated States, of which at least two shall be Member States or Associated candidate countries.

In addition, a single participant such as an European Economic Interest Group (EEIG) or any legal entity established in a Member State or Associated State according to its national law and which are made up of independent legal entities managing publicly funded national or regional programmes from at least three different Member States or Associated States, of which at least two shall be a Member State or Associated candidate country, may be the sole participant in an ERA-NET.

It has to be emphasised that preference will be given to ERA-NET actions involving a more substantial number of Member States or Associated States than the minimum legally number required of three in order to obtain a significant structuring effect at European level.

On top of the minimum number of participants legally required for an ERA-NET, legal entities such as charities or other private organisations which also manage research programmes that are strategically planned and executed at national or regional level, may participate and receive Community funding.

Specific support actions

For ERA-NETs specific support actions, the minimum number of participants is one of the above mentioned participants.

3.3 Participation and funding

Participants' location	Participation	Funding
European Union	Rightfully	Rightfully
Associated Candidate Countries	Rightfully	Rightfully
Other Associated States	Rightfully	Rightfully
International organisations of European interest	Rightfully	Rightfully
Third countries or other international organisations having a co-operation agreement (other than those referred to above)	Rightfully over and above the minimum threshold	If it is essential for carrying out the project
Other third Countries or other international organisations	Over and above the minimum threshold if it is necessary for carrying out the project	If it is essential for carrying out the project

4 ACTIVITIES TO BE SUPPORTED WITHIN AN ERA-NET

To advance the process of better European cooperation between research activities carried out at national or regional level, each ERA-NET will probably foresee an evolving set of activities in which the coordination element gradually deepens. Starting by increasing mutual knowledge through information exchange among policy makers and managers of similar scientific areas, the ERA-NET would be expected to lead step-wise to stronger forms of cooperation and coordination.

ERA-NET activities should be related to coordination activities developed by programme managers and for this reason should not be directly related to specific scientific projects or to the work of individual scientists.

Given the long-term nature of this process, there may well be a need for each ERA-NET to establish a “coherent management framework”.

4.1 Networking of research activities carried out at national and regional level including mutual opening of national or regional programmes

Networking activities may involve many levels of cooperation and coordination under a step by step perspective and depending on the degree of maturity of the network. An ERA-NET should be designed in such a way that the foreseen coordination is ambitious in the sense that it will cover at least the two first steps described below and will lead to concrete deliverables.

4.1.1 Systematic exchange of information and best practice

The goal of this activity is to improve communication, to develop better mutual knowledge and trust-building through a mutual learning process, systematic exchange of information and best practice among programme makers and among managers of similar scientific and technological areas.

“Information” should be understood as information on national and regional research and innovation activities such as national and regional programmes, funded projects, research priorities, evaluation practices, organisation and management.

Possible mechanisms for promoting the exchange of information are:

- fora of research programme makers and programme managers;
- short-term exchanges of programme managers;
- benchmarking and dissemination of good practice;
- use of electronic communication tools, including the use of common portals.

4.1.2 Strategic activities

The following types of strategic activities could be developed by programme makers and managers of national or regional research activities:

- development of mutual complementarities between the programmes of the ERA-NET partners;
- identification and analysis of research activities carried out by different programmes that have similar goals and that could lead to the design of future multinational schemes;
- identification and analysis of practical and concrete networking activities and mutual opening mechanisms;
- identification and analysis of barriers that hinder transnational cooperation activities such as, for example, administrative and legal barriers;
- identification of new opportunities and gaps in research and stimulation of new interdisciplinary work on the basis of technology assessment and foresight analysis carried out at regional, national and European level;

- design of common evaluation systems.

4.1.3 Implementation of joint activities

Based on such strategic activities, ERA-NETs could establish the following joint activities:

- A posteriori clustering of nationally or regionally funded research projects.

In order to cluster a posteriori national or regional research projects, programme managers will define activities to achieve this purpose. This could involve the identification and the selection of projects and the organisation of activities such as workshops and working groups among scientists involved in the nationally funded research projects. Such activities should have programmatic objectives that go beyond a simple exchange of scientific information between researchers.

- The systematic use of multinational evaluation procedures.

In the long term, this measure could contribute to the integration of multinational evaluation in national or regional research systems (covering proposal, project and programme evaluation). This could involve the identification of common evaluation criteria and methods.

- Joint training activities.

Developing joint training schemes or activities such as co-supervised theses and international PhD schemes could be envisaged, provided that they are an integral of a wider cooperation in research.

- Mutual opening of facilities or laboratories.

Developing a scheme to facilitate mutual access to facilities or laboratories in one country for scientists from another.

4.1.4 Transnational research activities

A stronger form of networking would consist of implementing a programme of transnational research activities. This could imply setting up a common strategy, a joint work programme, common calls for proposals, a common multinational evaluation and a common plan for dissemination of results or experiences. In this case, projects submitted to a joint call for proposals should involve at least two teams from two different countries. A posteriori clustering of selected projects should also be done if possible.

In this context, several possibilities could be envisaged:

- a) Each country or region would pay for the participation of its own researchers and research activities.

b) The implementation of a programme of transnational research activities entails transnational flows of national funding. Two approaches are possible:

- a country pays for participation of other countries' researchers or research teams on the basis of mutually agreed conditions.
- countries pool funds in order to finance projects resulting from a joint call for proposals, according to commonly agreed evaluation criteria.

4.2 Management of an ERA-NET

Given the long-term nature of the cooperation inside an ERA-NET, the partners will be advised to establish a "coherent management framework", with dedicated staff, to coordinate their activities and to ensure a continuity of operation. Management tasks could include:

- scientific and administrative management of the activities of the ERA-NET, including communication with the Commission and reporting;
- development of strategic activities;
- ensuring that high standards of scientific excellence are maintained throughout the activities of the ERA-NET;
- ensuring that gender equality is promoted within the ERA-NET;
- launching, implementing and following up joint research activities.

Costs related to management activities can be supported under the ERA-NET contract.

5 THE PROPOSAL STAGE

5.1 Calls for proposals

An open call inviting proposals for ERA-NET activities (coordination actions and specific support actions) on a bottom-up basis, has been published in the Official Journal on the 17 December 2002. The first cut-off date will be 3 June 2003 with an indicative budget of 24 M€. From March 2004 there will be a cut-off date roughly every six months up to October 2005.

Ongoing ERA-NET projects willing to enlarge subsequently the scope of their activities and/or their partnership will be allowed to submit a supplementary proposal at any of the foreseen cut-off dates (see section 7.2).

5.2 Content of a proposal

The proposals should include the following:

- clearly defined objectives of the ERA-NET;
- impact that the ERA-NET will have on the national and regional programmes involved and its potential impact in terms of helping to structure the European Research Area;
- description of the activities foreseen throughout the lifetime of the ERA-NET and their timetable;

- description of each partner, its role within its national/regional system and its role within the ERA-NET, with an indication of the budgets of the programmes involved; the number of persons involved in the management, the mass of researchers in fine concerned (number of researchers), and activities developed within the programmes;
- plans for the organisation, management and governance of the ERA-NET;
- justification for the Community support requested;
- means of assuring the scientific quality of the activities supported by the ERA-NET;
- means to ensure sustainability of the activities beyond the period covered by the proposal;
- plan to ensure that gender equality will be promoted within the ERA-NET;
- dissemination plan of results and/or experiences.

5.3 Evaluation of proposals

The fundamental principles governing the evaluation process are:

- transparency: in order to provide a clear framework for managers of RTD programme/activities who are preparing funding proposals, the process by which funding decisions are reached, both the principles and the practice, must be clearly described and available to any interested party;
- fair treatment: all proposals should be treated alike, irrespective of where they originate or the identity of the proposers;
- impartiality: all eligible proposals are treated impartially on their merits, following an independent review;
- efficiency and speed: the procedures must be designed to be as rapid as possible, commensurate with maintaining the quality of the evaluation and respecting the legal framework and accountability within which the RTD programme is to be managed;
- ethical considerations: any proposal which contravenes fundamental ethical principles (particularly those set out in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the Union), or which does not fulfil the conditions set out in the work programme or in the call for proposals, may be excluded from the evaluation and selection process at any time.

The evaluation procedure will be further described in the Commission's evaluation manual and in the work programme of the Specific Programme.

5.3.1 Peer review

The evaluation of proposals will involve a single stage submission procedure. The Commission will arrange the evaluation of proposals received according to the principles of "peer review" by independent experts.

5.3.2 *Evaluation criteria*

5.3.2.1 Co-ordination actions

The following set of criteria is intended to be a common basis for the evaluation of proposals for coordination actions.

a) Relevance to the objectives of the programme (threshold score 3 out of 5)

The extent to which:

- the proposed project addresses the scientific, technical, socio-economic and policy objectives of the work programme.

b) Quality of the coordination (threshold score 4 out of 5)

The extent to which:

- the research actions/programmes to be coordinated represent clear progress beyond the current state-of-the-art.
- the coordination mechanisms proposed are sufficiently robust for ensuring the goals of the action.

c) Potential impact (threshold score 3 out of 5)

The extent to which:

- the impact of the proposed work can best be achieved if carried out at European level.
- the Community support would have a real impact on the action and its scale, ambition and outcome.
- the project mobilises a critical mass of resources in Europe
- exploitation and/or dissemination plans are adequate to ensure optimal use of the project results, where possible beyond the participants in the project.

d) Quality of the consortium (threshold score 3 out of 5)

The extent to which:

- the participants collectively constitute a consortium of high quality.
- the participants are well-suited to the tasks assigned to them.
- the project combines the complementary expertise of the participants to generate added value with respect to the individual participants' programmes.

e) Quality of the management (threshold score 3 out of 5)

The extent to which:

- the project management is demonstrably of high quality.
- there is a satisfactory plan for the management of knowledge, of intellectual property and of other innovation-related activities.

f) Mobilisation of resources (threshold score 3 out of 5)

The extent to which:

- the project provides for the resources (personnel, equipment, financial...) necessary for success.
- the resources are convincingly integrated to form a coherent project.
- the overall financial plan for the project is adequate.

The overall threshold is 21 out of 30.

To supplement the criteria applicable to coordination actions, **three complementary items** will be added for the evaluation of ERA-NET proposals:

Quality of coordination

- the management should be supported by a suitable governance structure involving the participating organisations at a appropriate level.

Potential impact

- the participants should be the key actors within their national or regional research systems.
- the ERA-NET activities should lay the foundations for a durable cooperation between the partners involved.

5.3.2.2 Specific support actions

The following set of issues is intended to be common to all parts of FP6 for the evaluation of proposals for specific support actions.

a) Relevance to the objectives of the programme (threshold score 4 out of 5)

The extent to which:

- the proposal addresses key issues to achieve or support the objectives defined in the work programme/call, specific programmes or ERA, as appropriate.

b) Quality of the support action (threshold score 3 out of 5)

The extent to which:

- the proposed objectives are sound and the proposed approach, methodology and work plan are of a sufficiently high quality for achieving these objectives.
- the applicant(s) represent(s) a high level of competence in terms of professional qualifications and/or experience.
- the proposed activities are innovative and original (if applicable).

c) Potential impact (threshold score 3 out of 5)

The extent to which:

- the impact of the proposed work can best be achieved if carried out at European level.
- the Community support would have a real impact on the action and its scale, ambition and outcome.
- exploitation and/or dissemination plans are adequate to ensure optimal use of the project results, where possible beyond the participants in the project.

d) Quality of the management (threshold score 3 out of 5)

The extent to which:

- the management structure is credible in terms of professional qualifications, experience, track record and capacity to deliver.

e) Mobilisation of resources (threshold score 3 out of 5)

The extent to which:

- the project provides for the resources (personnel, equipment, financial...) necessary for success.
- the overall financial plan for the project is adequate.

The overall threshold is 21 out of 30.

6 CONTRACTUAL RELATIONSHIP

6.1 Content of the contract

The contract with the Commission will establish the rights and obligations of participants. It might include among others:

- a core text specifying the scope, duration, amount of the Community grant, reporting schedule and payment modalities, and the list of initial participants;
- a technical annex containing the objectives of the ERA-NET, a description of the joint activities; a description of the role of the participants, a description of the deliverables, ethical provisions, and a description of the management and governance structure;
- general conditions common to all FP 6 instruments, covering standard legal and administrative provisions, the IPR regime if necessary, and standard financial provisions among others.
- conditions specific to the instruments used.

The Community grant will not be broken down in the contract either by activity or by participant.

6.2 Responsibility and liability of the participants

Technical implementation of an ERA-NET action shall be the collective responsibility of the participants. Each participant shall also be liable for the use of the Community financial contribution in proportion to his share of the project up to a maximum of the total payments he has received.

Where a participant is an international organisation, a public body or a legal entity whose participation to the indirect action is guaranteed by a Member State or an Associated State, this participant is solely responsible for its own debt and shall not bear the debt of any other participant.

When several legal entities are grouped in a common legal entity acting as a single participant the liability of its members shall be defined according to the law under which this common legal entity was established.

6.3 Consortium agreement

The participants may wish to conclude a consortium agreement although the Commission will not require it. Such a consortium agreement may include:

- the decision-making processes they will use;
- the sharing out of tasks and resources among the participants;
- the management of the Community contribution;
- specific arrangements concerning intellectual property rights to be applied among the participants who will contribute to the generation of knowledge, in compliance with the general arrangements stipulated in the contract;
- any other provision necessary to ensure an effective governance and a sound management of ERA-NET.

7 POSSIBLE EVOLUTION OF AN ERA-NET

The work plan and the composition of the consortium can be modified under the responsibility of the consortium through appropriately defined modalities among partners. Two possibilities are envisaged :

7.1 Evolution of ERA-NETs without modification of financial allocation

7.1.1 Modification of the workplan

The execution plan for the remaining life of ERA-NETs may be modified, notably following the mid-term review, with the agreement of the Commission, taking into consideration:

- progress achieved by the consortium in its various activities;
- global scientific and technological developments in the field;
- the need for re-orienting foreseen activities or introducing new ones as a consequence of any evolution of the ERA-NET;
- other relevant factors.

7.1.2 Changes in consortium membership

The consortium may itself decide to take in new members, though without additional financing. The contract will specify the procedures to be followed. All modifications will require the agreement of the Commission and, may require a contract amendment.

7.2 Evolution of ERA-NETs with increase of financial allocation

Proposals requesting additional funding to extend the activities and/or the participants in existing ERA-NETs may be submitted at any of the cut-off dates and at the final deadline in 2005.

In addition to the elements requested from regular proposals (see point 5.2), the proposals should include:

- description of new activities and their relevance to the objective of the ERA-NET and/or description of new partners and their role within the ERA-NET;
- identification of the added value of the enlargement of the ERA-NET, including cost/efficiency factors.

8 INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY ASPECTS

The rules relating to intellectual property proposed for the Sixth Framework Programme are intended to apply to all FP6 activities, including the ERA-NET actions.

As an illustration, the IPR rules for FP6 would apply to any documents, software or databases created in the context of a networking or a mutual opening of research activities.

The IPR rules for FP6 will not apply to the results of the national or regional programmes being coordinated or networked. These results will be governed by the respective applicable national or regional rules.

9 FOLLOW UP AND MONITORING

The Commission services will monitor the project so as to ensure proper execution of the work according to the terms of the contract, to protect the Community's financial interests and to ensure maximum synergy and coherence with other actions within the Sixth Framework Programme.

A project officer will be assigned to follow-up each ERA-NET. Persons with the appropriate expertise may assist the project officer.

The project officer will also organise a mid-term review for each ERA-NET of a duration of three years or more. The review should consist in a strategic analysis examining in particular what is the European added value of the ERA-NET in terms of its strengthening effect on ERA and what are the "strengths and weaknesses" of the ERA-NET. When applicable, the mid-term review would lead to the modification, if necessary, of the initial workplan. Any ERA-NET that is found not to be performing satisfactorily at the mid-term review may have its contract terminated.

10 AUDITS

The model contract will specify an audit regime to enable the Commission to proceed to audits:

- Activity audits may be launched at any point during the implementation of the ERA-NET in order to verify that the network has been carrying out its tasks in accordance with the contract.
- Financial audits may be launched at any time, and may deal with any financial aspect of the contract.
- Ethical audits may be launched at any point during the implementation of the ERA-NET in order to verify that the network has been carrying out its tasks with respect of fundamental ethical principles and national regulations.
- Audits dealing with the use and dissemination of results and/or experiences may be launched at the end of the contract, but may also be carried out earlier, if considered necessary by the Commission.

Various audits may be undertaken simultaneously. The Commission itself will conduct them or entitle another entity to do so.

11 INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE

In order to obtain information on the ERA-NET scheme and assistance for preparing an ERA-NET proposal, "National Contact Points" (NCPS) have been established in Member States and Associated States. The NCPS database is accessible at the following address : <http://www.cordis.lu/fp6/ncp.htm>.

Furthermore, any questions on the ERA-NET Scheme can be addressed to the Commission at the following e-mail address: rtd-coordination@cec.eu.int.