Annex 1

Call for proposals EACEA No 34/2015

Erasmus+ Key Action 3: Support for policy reform - Initiatives for policy innovation

European policy experimentations in the fields of Education, Training and Youth led by high-level public authorities

GUIDELINES FOR PLANNING AND CONDUCTING A EUROPEAN POLICY EXPERIMENTATION PROJECT INVOLVING FIELD TRIALS

This Annex forms integral part of call for proposals EACEA 34/2015 (hereafter "the Call"). It provides an overview of the main steps and general guidance for planning and conducting a European policy experimentation in the context of this call. It clarifies concepts, processes and activities mentioned in the Call and describes in more detail the respective roles and tasks of the different entities involved.
Applicants are invited to draw on this document for reference when drawing up their applications.

1. Introduction[1]

European policy experimentations help to assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, potential impact and scalability of innovative policy measures through *experimental* or *semi-experimental* approaches. They seek to identify and evaluate a *causality link* between a measure and the *change* (or lack of change) that has occurred in a sample population through that measure (*counterfactual analysis*), and to determine the logic behind the change. They involve measurable direct interventions and comparisons (e.g. "before/after", or "treated"/"non-treated" groups) through field trials taking place in a *controlled* environment.

Policy experimentations can be cost-effective, help to secure stakeholder consensus and a smooth implementation of policies when used to test substantial measures at the appropriate time. In an ex-ante evaluation process involving progressive steps towards implementation, experimental field trials can be one of the final steps, confirming already robust assumptions and identifying and testing scalable approaches. Ideally, within the priority themes listed in the Call, field trials should not address broad topics, but target **specific measures** to be tested within a well-defined, concrete scope.

Field trials should address specific groups, specific contexts or geographical areas. They should respect clear schedules to ensure concrete results within a reasonable time frame. Their findings

[1] For additional reference on randomised controlled trials and their use in education policy, applicants may wish to refer to EENEE Analytical Report n. 11", February 2012 (http://www.eenee.de/portal/page/portal/EENEEContent/IMPORTTELECENTRUM/DoCs/EENEE AR11.p df).

should be analysed and interpreted according to objective and generally accepted criteria.

2. Actors

Three key actors in European policy experimentations are: the responsible public authorities, the researchers and the target groups[2]. Other stakeholders can also play major roles, for example in terms of coordination, supervision, mediation or expertise.
When preparing an application, it is essential to involve all the relevant actors. They should reach a consensus on the main elements of the experimentation, including : objectives, analysis of needs, the measure to be tested, the initial hypothesis, structures to be involved, target groups, potential participants in the field trials (including identification and selection criteria), human and financial resources, expected quantitative and qualitative outcomes, research and analysis methodologies, potential for follow-up, etc..

The responsible public authorities

The **responsible public authorities** must collectively determine the key strategic features of the project, i.e.:

- the issue (need) to be addressed through the experimentation, who is affected and who should benefit from the measure that will be tested (target group);
- the measure through which they expect to resolve the issue, and which they want to test;
- the effects that the measure is expected to produce on the target groups;
- the partners and other stakeholders to be involved in the project and their respective roles;
- the indicative size of the (human and financial) resources they will make available ;
- a roadmap for the whole project and in particular for the field trials;
- the monitoring arrangements to ensure that the experimentation remains consistent with the initial objectives;
- options for concrete follow-up, in particular in relation to reform agendas at country level.

The quality of the analysis and interpretation of the findings of the field trials is essential. In addition to the guidance provided in this Call, the responsible public authorities should therefore also bear in mind distinctive elements linked to the specific (geographical, political, cultural, sector-specific, etc.) context in which the field trials will take place.
Each responsible public authority should implement the field trials in the territory under its jurisdiction through the protocol agreed with the other partner authorities and the researchers.

The responsible public authorities should also ensure transparent and comprehensive information and communication on the project and in particular on the field trials (see below)

The researchers

The **researchers** design the protocols for the field trials and supervise their implementation; they gather, structure and analyse the quantitative and qualitative information collected through the trials and report on them. They help to interpret the findings in cooperation with the other

[2] See definitions in main text of the call.

partners, in particular the responsible public authorities. On this basis, they provide suggestions or recommendations on the possible follow-up.

The target groups

The target groups are the persons who are expected to directly benefit from the tested measure (learners of all ages, young people, families, staff, institutional or organisational leaders, etc.). Some of them will participate in the field trials on a voluntary basis. Target groups must be timely and comprehensively informed about the objectives, process, results, evaluation and planned follow-up of the trials and on the project in general. Applicants should ensure that the necessary knowledge and skills to perform the field trials are available and offer training, mentoring and continuous support.

Other stakeholders

Relevant agencies and services, civil society and social partner organisations, local communities, supervising authorities, including at local level, etc., can help to raise awareness, clarify and promote the aims and operation of an experimentation project. They can help to improve transparency, to build trust and ownership, disseminate the experimentation results and support the follow-up.

3. Transparency and consensus

Transparent information, communication and cooperation with stakeholders and (potential) participants are essential to build trust, consensus and ownership, and ensure successful field trials. Applicants should describe the setting in which the new measure should be introduced and in which the field trials will be performed. They should involve key stakeholders and (potential) participants and seek their commitment as soon as the project discussion starts. They should explain how they plan to obtain such commitment.

Applicants should ensure that stakeholders and (potential) participants receive continuous, appropriate, clear, accurate and timely information on the objectives, content, organisation, expected level of involvement, implications and follow-up of the field trials. They should stress the benefits that participants could draw from the project and, where appropriate, offer unbiased incentives.

Applicants should be aware of and respect needs, perceptions and constraints of the target groups and participants. They should take suitable steps to identify and mitigate possible concerns linked to issues such as workload, safety, loss of freedom, authority, etc..

They should be aware of the need to sustain the interest in the project until completion.

4. Preparation and design

4.1 Identifying the need

Applicants should demonstrate the existence of a real need for intervention. The need can be identified at national or at European level, for example a challenge or priority in the framework of European cooperation, a country-specific recommendation issued during the European Semester, or any other issue which is a policy priority shared by the partner countries.

4.2 Choosing the measure to be tested, defining the hypothesis

Applicants should describe in detail the measure to be tested and its relevance. They should describe the hypothesis to be verified by explaining how the measure will address the need (causal link) and impact on (benefit) the target groups.

The measure chosen should be relevant and acceptable for the target groups. It should be feasible and commensurate to the operational, strategic and financial capacity of the partners and target groups.

In this context, applicants are strongly encouraged to draw on a thorough literature review. This desk research should involve evidence that the measure to be tested is likely to benefit the participants – even though this will only be demonstrated after the completion of the project.

Applicants are also strongly encouraged to anchor their proposals to the work carried out in the context of the Strategic Framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020), in particular the ET 2020 Working Groups[3] and/or the European Youth Strategy.

4.3 Choosing the experimentation method

The experimentation plan should be consistent with the strategic objectives of the measure and the context in which it would be implemented. Applicants are free to choose the experimentation method as long as it relies on robust conceptual foundations and rigorous operational procedures, in compliance with the principles of experimental or quasi-experimental research for testing variables and validating results. Qualitative as well as quantitative data should be taken into account. Applicants may consider appointing a scientific committee to play an advisory role in this context.

Choosing the appropriate experimentation method can be a trade-off between the cost (in terms of time, money and complexity) of the field trials and the cost of scaling up an ineffective measure - or stopping an effective measure – due to unsound experimental conclusions.

Applicants should describe the ex-ante analysis that has led to the choice of the experimentation method, including considerations such as:

- the (geographical, political, socio-economic, institutional, sector-specific) context within which the measure would be implemented and the trials will take place;
- the attitude of target groups regarding their participation in the field trials;
- ethical and cultural considerations ;
- the degree of (un)certainty of the outcome of the field trials;
- the quality and reliability of the evaluation method, risk and success factors, liabilities and opportunities, potential spill-over or "peer" effects;
- the cost of the experimentation;
- the cost- effectiveness of up-scaling the measure.

Methods that yield robust results can make the up-scaling decision smoother and are likely to be more acceptable to stakeholders but may be more expensive.

Some indicative examples of evaluation methods based on different underlying assumptions are briefly described below.

[3] http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/expert-groups_en.htm

EXAMPLES OF EXPERIMENTATION METHODS[4]

1. Comparing participants to non-participants; involving individuals eligible for the measure but who *chose* not to participate in it[5].

2. Before-after comparisons: the *same population* is used both as treatment and control group by comparing it before and after the action.

3. Statistical matching: it builds "pairs" of beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries who are similar to each other and compares the "twins" with each other.

4. Difference in difference (DID): similar to the "before-after" method. It compares the *change* (evolution) over a time period across the two groups.

5. Regression discontinuity: it compares beneficiaries who are "almost" ineligible because they are slightly above/below the threshold to non-beneficiaries who are "almost" eligible for the same reason.

6. Randomised experimentations: methods involving some form of *random assignment* are recommended since they are the most reliable. A representative sample of the target population is divided into treatment group and the control group on the basis of a random assignment ("lottery").

5. Experimental protocols

The protocols for the field trials should be in line with the highest analytical standards.

The researchers are partners in the project. However, their neutrality, impartiality and independence with regard to the other partners – in particular the public authorities – is key to secure the credibility of the outcomes of the experimentation.

An experimental protocol should be applied in at least three of the partner countries, under the leadership of the respective responsible public authorities. It should involve a sufficiently representative number of participants (entities/individuals) in order to reach a realistic and representative critical mass and provide significant evidence.

Protocols should include key elements such as the identification of the key stakeholders and of the groups participating in the field trials, of the planned set of actions and main operating steps, and identify of potential opportunities and constraints. The expected quantitative and qualitative impact of the tested measure should be defined in measurable terms.

A protocol should include:

a) A comprehensive plan identifying roles, responsibilities and resources, a roadmap of the various steps involved, monitoring, reporting and follow-up provisions;

b) The definition/identification of groups of participants in the field trials. These groups should be qualitatively and quantitatively appropriate to the methodology and target groups. The groups of participants should be selected following transparent principles and procedures;

c) Typology and timing of the field trials

[4] For further details please refer to "Social Experimentation – A methodological guide for policy makers"

[5] This may be not be applicable where testing compulsory approaches that all learners are required to complete within a pilot and therefore cannot choose not to participate.

d) Agreed assessment criteria, benchmarks and indicators for ensuring valid results.

f Ethical guidelines

g) Definition of intellectual property rights on the quantitative and qualitative data used/produced in the framework of the experimentation.

6. Analysis and interpretation of the findings

Evaluation of the results does not mean evaluation of the people.

The findings of the field trials should be analysed in order to measure the effectiveness, efficiency and likely impact of the tested measure, but also of the experimentation methodology, of the conditions for scalability and transferability of the lessons learned and good practice (peer learning).

The results of the field trials should first be analysed in each participating country by the researchers, who should express a professional judgment on the extent to which the tested measure has produced **a clearly defined impact** and on what would have happened in the absence of the action.

The researchers should then share their findings with the other partners (in particular the responsible public authorities), identifying success and risk factors, good (and bad) practice.

The results of the work carried out in the different countries should then be shared and discussed among all the partner countries, trying to identify common success and risk factors, good (and bad) practice.

Finally, the responsible partner authorities should discuss and identify options for follow-up.

7. Ethical considerations

The results of the projects carried out under the present call will be made public in various formats tailored to different audiences (policy makers, the education/youth communities, academia, the general public, etc.). Experimental designs may involve observations or the collection of data (through surveys, questionnaires, interviews, standardised tests, recordings, etc.) on individuals or institutions who directly participate and agree to the use of their personal information. This may involve risks of harm through, for example: unfair treatment, stress, withheld benefits or discomfort. It may also involve risks of falsification of data, plagiarism, abuse of confidentiality, etc.

When designing and implementing field trials under the present call, all the parties involved are therefore encouraged to protect the values, rights and interests of the participants and to respect basic ethical principles such as *non-maleficence* (acts should not cause avoidable or intentional harm to others), *informed consent* and *fair treatment*. All the parties involved should act consistently with the principles and professional/ethical codes of conduct applicable in the respective institutions and countries.

8.1 *Non maleficence*

The experimentation should promote interventions bringing benefits to the participants. The method should be appropriate to the chosen topic and the target group (age, social/cultural level/background). Data collection should be justified by the needs of the participants, target the right groups and follow a suitable timeline.

The parties involved should be aware of potential implications for vulnerable individuals or institutions linked to psychological, social or cultural perceptions. Such implications could be mitigated, for example, by explaining the meaning of questions in advance or by emphasising the right not to answer or participate if participants feel uncomfortable.

8.2 Informed consent

Participation in field trials is voluntary. Anyone has the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw participation or data at any time without any consequences.

Participation must be free (potential participants should not feel pressured or forced) and based on informed consent[6]. Consent must be requested and obtained in advance in writing[7] (preserving privacy) on the basis of comprehensive information provided in a language and in terms that are understandable to the (potential) participants. A lack of response to a written request may indicate unwillingness to participate.

(Potential) participants should be informed on the project aims and methods and on how data will be collected, protected during the project and either destroyed or subsequently reused. They should be made aware of the nature of their participation and of potential implications, including how unexpected or incidental findings will be handled.

The participation of institutions/organisations (eg schools) in field trials should be formally endorsed by the responsible management body/bodies. The management and staff directly concerned (eg administrators, teachers) should be in agreement with the decision.

When field trials involve direct contacts with minors, beneficiaries should seek written consent on participation from the parents or the persons holding parental responsibility, and assent from the minors themselves through age-appropriate means[8].

8.3 Fair treatment

The selection of participants must be based on clear and accessible criteria. These criteria should be equivalent and comparable in all the countries performing the field trials, as far as different systems and structures allow it.

Members of "comparison groups" ("control groups" or equivalent) and not of "treatment groups" (or equivalent) should receive clear explanations on the methodology and on the benefits that they can derive by participating in the trials even if they will not be testing the new measure, in order to prevent feelings of discrimination.

8.4 Handling of information[9]

Beneficiaries must comply with the privacy and data protection legislation applicable in the country where the trials are carried out. The anonymity of participants must be preserved; personal names must never be disclosed; data must be presented only in aggregate form.

Information gathered from individuals or from archival sources should be held in secure conditions. Its retrieval should be restricted to authorised personnel, as defined by the partners.

Participants wishing to access their personal information should request this in writing;

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[6] This can reduce the risk of withdrawal at a later stage.

[7] In exceptional cases where written consent can be perceived as harmful or offensive, oral consent can be requested

[8] Not necessarily in writing

[9] Directive 95/46/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 1995 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, OJEC (23.11.95) No. L 281/31 – 39

Information should be destroyed in a timely manner after the completion of the project based on an agreement among the partners.

If confidential information is gained form a third party, the same guarantees of confidentiality and safe storage should apply.

9. Intellectual property rights (IPR)

Erasmus+ promotes open access rights[10] to materials, documents and media that are useful for learning, teaching training and youth work and are produced by projects funded by the programme. Open access is not a requirement to publish, as authors are free to publish or not, nor does it interfere with the decision to exploit research results commercially e.g. through patenting. The decision on whether to publish open access documents must come after the more general decision on whether to go for a publication directly or to seek first protection using Intellectual Property Rights.*"*

The partnership is strongly encouraged to consider and tackle IPR issues as early as possible during the preparation of the project, and to negotiate any relevant questions with the other participants before starting the project, as IPR issues can affect both the way a project is conducted, and the exploitation of results after the end of the project.

The project results "*foreground*" (including information, materials and knowledge) is owned by the partner generating it. When foreground its generated jointly, it will be jointly owned, unless the partners concerned agree on different solution. All the partners must agree on the allocation and the terms for exercising the ownership of foreground and its transfer modalities. Valuable foreground should be protected[11]. Where dissemination (including publication) of foreground does not adversely affect its protection and use, there is an obligation to disseminate it swiftly. No dissemination of foreground may take place before a decision is made regarding its possible protection.

Regarding the information and knowledge "*background*" (including databases, training modules etc) held by the partners prior to the experimentation, partners should agree beforehand on the use of the access rights. Partners must define in the partnership agreement what is the background and state the obligation to grant access right.

IPR issues should be handled in line with ARTICLE I.7 – ADDITIONAL PROVISIONS ON USE OF THE RESULTS (INCLUDING INTELLECTUAL AND INDUSTRIAL PROPERTY RIGHTS in the Agreement and ARTICLE II.8 – PRE-EXISTING RIGHTS AND OWNERSHIP AND USE OF THE RESULTS (INCLUDING INTELLECTUAL AND INDUSTRIAL PROPERTY RIGHTS) in the Annex 2 general conditions".

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[10] See Guidelines for applicants, Section 3.3 "Expected results".

[11] Protection is not mandatory in all cases. The decision for not protecting the foreground should be made in consultation with all partners.