

# Open Innovation Call



Call to businesses and knowledge centres to collaborate  
in building a strong innovation climate!



Ministerie van Economische Zaken



**EUROPEAN UNION**  
European Regional Development Fund



• Stimulates • Facilitates • Connects

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# Background

In recent years, several innovation environments have been created in the Northern Netherlands, often with support of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Innovation environments are places or networks where knowledge and business merge. These environments provide fertile ground for the creation of new and innovative ideas.

Most of the innovation environments created in the Northern Netherlands are actual physical environments. But there are also a number of ambitious non-physical collaborative initiatives. By facilitating collaboration between businesses and knowledge centers, these initiatives aim to generate a series of innovations. Rather than simply developing an isolated innovation process, they create a structure through which several related innovation processes can emerge. Both physical and non-physical collaborative initiatives are usually set up around a certain theme or social issue.

The creation of innovation environments and structural collaborative initiatives has done a lot to improve the innovation climate in the Northern Netherlands. Yet, at the same time, it is also clear that the initiatives launched to date have yet to deliver the desired economic impact. At the moment the interaction between businesses and knowledge centers is not intensive enough, the relatively few innovation processes that have been initiated have had relatively little impact, there is not enough coherence between the innovation environments, and, above all, the number of small and medium-sized enterprises actively participating in the initiatives is usually confined to a relatively small group of pioneers.



*“There is considerable innovation potential in the Northern Netherlands. We are looking for initiatives that harness this potential – initiatives capable of generating related innovations that can become new economic strengths.*

*We are therefore calling on businesses and knowledge centers to develop joint initiatives that will lead to a structural improvement in our innovation performance in the Northern Netherlands.”*

Sander de Rouwe,  
Chair of the Economic Affairs  
Steering Committee set up by the  
Northern Netherlands Alliance  
(SNN)



# 1. WHAT ARE WE LOOKING FOR?

**SNN** is launching a call to businesses and knowledge centers to cooperate in order to develop initiatives that are capable of generating a series of related innovations, which together can become economic strengths of the Northern Netherlands.

We are looking for initiatives that actively involve small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and ideally end users, in innovation processes. Besides contributing to the structural improvement of the innovation ecosystem, these initiatives will also help develop a creative climate that sparks more ideas. These ideas can eventually become innovations with clear market potential that have a significant economic and societal impact in the Northern Netherlands.

## Initiatives can focus on:

- promising new areas that can emerge as new strengths in the Northern Netherlands, obvious examples include new niche markets, new technologies and/or crossovers (developers/pioneers);
- meeting the challenges of changing market conditions with new value chains and/or business models (users/developers);
- increasing the innovation potential of SMEs, and, in particular, increasing the number of small businesses that engage in open innovation processes (followers/users);
- and/or a combination of the above.

# 2. What makes a project a good project?

**W**e are more interested in what you intend to achieve (your goal) than how you do it. Your job is to convince us that the way you intend to achieve your goal is the most effective way to ensure results. This means that your project application will essentially be assessed in terms of how it will contribute to the achievement of the objective outlined in this Call for Applications. We are interested in how your project will help solve the problem we have identified. In other words, we are not specifying at the outset what types of projects do or do not qualify, or what types of activities are or are not eligible for a grant. As a government agency we do not presume to know what types of projects are likely to generate the most significant initiatives, or the most effective way to organise these projects.

**‘Now it’s up to you. The more closely your goal is aligned with ours, the more likely it is that your application will be approved.’**

We are expecting applications for projects that are dissimilar in nature. Each project will be assessed on its own merits. The assessment will include a specific strengths and weaknesses analysis. Various differentiating elements could be the deciding factor for any one project. The results of the specific strengths and weaknesses analysis will also be assessed in relation to the amount of funding requested.

### 3. How do you make your project stand out?

It is important that projects contribute to a structural improvement of the innovation ecosystem in the Northern Netherlands. In other words, we want to foster the stronger emergence of a creative climate in which:

- new ideas (also from unexpected angles) evolve into significant innovations;
- businesses, knowledge centers and social organisations form structural connections and focus on innovation, especially innovation that transcends sectoral boundaries and creates connections between value chains;
- collaborative initiatives and innovation environments are more closely aligned;
- open innovation is high on the business agenda, with more SMEs bringing in external knowledge for their innovation processes and more enterprises developing new business models to capitalise on internal knowledge.

#### Coherence and collaboration

Coherence and collaboration are a priority. We are looking for projects that present a coherent set of activities and involve parties that can jointly develop new innovations and/or together remove barriers that hinder the development of significant innovations.

#### Integrated approach

We are looking for projects with a strong vision and a comprehensive view, and initiators who can place their project in a broad context. In other words, we are looking for projects with wide support base. If it is logical for certain parties to be involved in the initiative, those parties must be actively involved. In other words, we want to see projects *with* businesses rather than *for* businesses. Please note that this grant does *not* provide for the exploitation of institutes, organisations or intermediaries.

#### Business generation

The initiation of several related innovation processes is not the final aim. Ultimately, what matters is that the Northern Netherlands exploits new development opportunities and that an independent and innovative SME sector succeeds in generating more business.

#### Lasting impact

We are looking for projects that bring about structural change, i.e. projects with a convincing vision of how things will evolve when the funding period ends.

#### Social significance

Projects that are likely to succeed are effective in helping to address the social issues identified in the Regional Innovation Strategy (RIS3) and Northern Innovation Agenda (NIA) for the Northern Netherlands.

Strong projects are deeply committed to corporate social responsibility. They strike a balance between people, planet and prosperity and help create an inclusive circular economy.

### Consortium

A convincing consortium is as important as a convincing project proposal. We are looking for parties that are capable of achieving the project objectives and managing the risks inherent to innovation.

## How this instrument relates to other SNN grant schemes

This grant instrument is complementary to other instruments implemented under the ERDF Operational Programme. Most of the instruments currently supported by the ERDF focus on the valorisation of individual innovation processes, whereas this new instrument focuses on integrated initiatives that generate related innovation processes. The new instrument could be compared with a ball-throwing machine. The instruments currently implemented by SNN are primarily designed to intercept and advance individual balls (in this case innovation processes), whereas this new instrument is designed to increase the productivity of the machine (the number of related balls it produces).

## 4. WHAT ARE WE OFFERING?

**W**e are offering funding that covers up to 40% of your eligible costs for a period of up to four years.

Applications will be assessed by an external expert committee. On the advice of this committee, promising but high-risk projects may be awarded staged funding, with the release of subsequent funding being dependent on a positive assessment of the previous stage(s).

If this kind of arrangement is recommended, we will work out the details in consultation with you. The awarding of the initial grant is always based on an assessment of a comprehensive and integrated project proposal. Feasibility studies and projects do not fall within the scope of this instrument.

### Top-up grants

Top-up grants may be issued by the provinces of Groningen, Fryslân and/or Drenthe (and/or municipalities in the Northern Netherlands). For top-up funding you must submit a separate application to the provincial and/or municipal authorities. SNN is not responsible for top-up grants.

### Budget and potential funding

To achieve our objectives we have a total budget of € 20 million, of which € 12 million is provided through the ERDF. The remaining amount is provided by the Dutch government. Ambitions and objectives are often related to the budget. Since we do not want to restrict the ambitions of initiators, we have not set an upper limit for the grant that can be awarded per project (other than the available budget).

### Our network

As well as asking you to involve relevant partners in your initiative, we also offer connections to other initiatives that we support, as well as the partners in our network.

By joining forces it is possible to create even more synergy and economies of scale.

### Support

Developing a project with several partners can prove to be quite challenging, especially when you need to ensure that the project is well organised and meets the various criteria. SNN and the provincial authorities can support you during this process.

### From an idea to a project that is likely to succeed

You have the option of submitting your proposal or project outline to the expert committee early on in the process (before submitting a grant application). The submitting of the proposal or project outline at this stage is agreed with SNN and the provincial authorities. This is not a pre-assessment, but an opportunity to receive informal feedback on your project proposal.



## 5. WHAT DO WE ASK OF YOU? (application)

**W**e want you to convince us not only of the merits of the content of your proposal, in terms of the requirements listed in this Call for Applications, but also of its feasibility, likelihood of success and compliance.

### Feasibility

Commitment is extremely important to us. We want to interact with strong project consortiums formed by professional organisations. It is your job to convince us that your consortium is fully capable of making the project a success.

### Likelihood of success

We ask you to present an argument backed up by detailed (market, chain and/or needs) analysis which explains how your initiative will make a significant contribution to the development of a

series of related innovations that have the potential to strengthen niche markets and/or the sector as a whole.

Innovation involves taking risks. We want to reward those who are prepared to invest a significant portion of their own assets in an initiative they believe in. At the same time we want this to be combined with a firm grasp of reality. We therefore ask you to provide a comprehensive analysis of the risks involved in the implementation of your project and details of the measures you are planning to take in order to control these risks.

### Compliance

We ask that you set up your project in such a way that it meets the criteria for financial support from the ERDF. A grant is a form of state aid. We are only permitted to provide such aid if this does not conflict with EU competition law. It is your job to convince us that your initiative will not disrupt market competition. The setup and organisation of your project must be in accordance with market competition principles.

*If your business or organisation does not possess the necessary expertise, we strongly recommend that you seek independent external advice and discuss it with us.*



## 6. HOW DOES IT WORK?

**W**e aim to facilitate a step-by-step process that enables you to submit a grant application that is likely to succeed.

### The preparatory stage

SNN acts as the gateway to the expert committee. You discuss your idea for a project with SNN and the provincial authorities and explain how it meets the requirements listed in Chapter 1 of this Call for Applications. Together we identify the elements that need to be elaborated in a project outline and when it should be submitted to the expert committee. At this stage the content is the primary concern.

### The grant application

Having gained feedback from the expert committee, you continue to develop the project plan and make sure that it is backed up by a solid and convincing argument. Once the project plan is sufficiently mature, you can attend to the grant requirements.

Just as the project plan must convince us of the merits of the content, the likelihood of success and feasibility, the application form must assure us that your project meets the grant criteria.

A state aid assessment (preferably conducted by an independent expert) must be appended to your application.

Your grant application consists of three documents, i.e. the project plan, the application form and a state aid assessment. You submit the application through the ERDF web portal:

<https://www.efro-webportal.nl/>.

SNN is available to provide feedback on your project setup and answer questions about the application process and grant criteria throughout the period prior to the submission of the application.

### Assessment

In consultation with SNN your application is scheduled for review and considered by the expert committee. It is possible that certain technical aspects may need to be elaborated in more detail. If the expert committee approves the content of the proposal, the application is then assessed in terms of its compliance with the grant criteria. Together we will dot the last 'i's and cross the last 't's as far as the application is concerned.

### Recommendation

Your grant application is submitted to the SNN's Economic Affairs Steering Committee, with a positive recommendation from the external expert committee, which weighs heavily in your favour.

### Decision

If your application is approved, a draft grant agreement and draft implementation agreement are drawn up and discussed with you. If you are happy with what has been proposed, the implementation agreement is signed and the funding is released. This marks the start of the implementation stage of the project.



*"Collaboration is an important factor for success. This applies not only during the assessment of your project, but even more so when it comes to ensuring the successful implementation of your project. We are not looking for projects for small businesses. We want to see projects with small businesses."*

Anne Jan Zwart,  
Chair of the ERDF OP Expert Committee

**For more information about the Open Innovation Call,  
please do not hesitate to contact us!**

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Interested in our other  
grant schemes?  
[www.echteinnovaties.nl](http://www.echteinnovaties.nl)



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