

EU Structural Funds – What, Why and How for NGIs

Background

Europe 2020 is the growth strategy for the coming decade for the EU to become a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy. It is established by the European Commission (EC) and through its flagship initiatives, such as the “Digital Agenda for Europe” and “Innovation Union”, provides an opportunity for the EGI community to play an important role in achieving some of the key objectives defined in this strategy and to benefit from it.

Action 55 of the Digital Agenda states that Member States should double the annual public spending on ICT research and development. One of the main strands of this action will be to increase the use of structural & regional development funds for ICT research facilities, and development projects on ICT products, services and applications.

In the report “EGI role towards Europe 2020” [1] produced by EGI.eu, one of the recommendations was for the NGIs to explore the use of Structural Funds (SF). Since 2010, the existing SF can be used for research and innovation projects. From 2013, SF programmes will have an increased emphasis on innovation and smart growth specialisation. In a period of financial constraints on public funding from national governments, it is important for research infrastructures to strengthen the relationships with the national authorities in order to fully utilise opportunities such as SF and their planned increased national public spending on ICT R&D.

What are the Structural Funds?

SF are one of the financial tools set up to implement the Cohesion policy by the EC. The other financial tool is the Cohesion Fund [2]. The SF is composed of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF).

Who can apply for Structural Funds?

Organisations from the EU Member States that are eligible for funding include public bodies, some private sector organisations (especially small businesses), universities, associations, NGOs and voluntary organisations. These legal entities must submit project proposals for approval in order to be awarded SF. Only specific regions within the Member states are eligible for the funding.

How to apply for Structural Funds?

EU Member States designate a managing authority that is responsible within the country for selecting projects and monitoring their implementation (see national contacts in [3]). The application process is explained in [4]. NGIs should thoroughly investigate the possibility of using SF as an integral part of their organisational plans. SF could be of crucial importance in defining the future funding environment of NGIs and their sustainability. For a list of funded projects see [5].

Final Remarks and Next Steps

The potential introduction of SF as a possible revenue stream to develop an NGI’s business model highlights how the future sustainability lays in the diversity of funding (SF programme, EC project funding, service charging, etc.). The next important event is the EGI Sustainability and Business workshop part of the upcoming EGI Technical Forum in Lyon – September 2011 [6].

References

- [1] EGI role towards Europe 2020 Report
<http://go.egi.eu/317>
- [2] Cohesion Policy
<http://go.egi.eu/cohesion-policy>
- [3] Structural Funds – National Contacts
<http://go.egi.eu/sf-national-contacts>
- [4] Structural Funds – How to Apply
<http://go.egi.eu/sf-how-to-apply>
- [5] Innovation, Research and Technological Development Projects
<http://go.egi.eu/sf-rtd-projects>
- [6] EGI Sustainability and Business Models Workshop
<http://go.egi.eu/egitf11-sustainability-workshop>