



GOVERNMENT
OF MALTA



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GUIDANCE NOTES

‘Support for Vocational Training and Skills Acquisition Actions’ Measure 1.1

RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME
(MALTA) 2014 - 2022

Template Version 2 – 1.2

05/05/2024

MANAGING AUTHORITY (EAFRD)

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Notices



The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development:
Europe investing in rural areas

HISTORY OF CHANGES		
Version	Publication Date	Change
1.2	05.05.2024	Publication of first version of calls

Procedure for the submission of applications

- Applications are to be sent by email on rdsuggestions.mees@gov.mt
- Applicants are to ensure to submit their application before noon (12pm Central European Time) of the indicated closing date.
- If Application and supporting documentation exceeds 20MB, please split the files in separate zipped folders and send in separate emails (*e.g. Application M10.2 Joe Borg - Part 2 of 3*)
- The MA remains available to confirm with applicants that an application has been received if contacted via email on rdsuggestions.mees@gov.mt or via Tel. 2555 2634 during office hours. The MA will also issue an acknowledgement letter.
- Note that the automated acknowledgement sent from the RDD mailbox does not in any way confirm or otherwise the (a) successful receipt of part or full application, nor, (b) that the application is deemed admissible.
- The applicants will be advised further, during the evaluation process, with regards to the submission of any necessary clarifications/documents required
- In case of any conflicts between these guidelines and the text of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2022 and other legislative text, the interpretation given by the RDP will be given priority. The English version will be the legally binding text.
- The Managing Authority reserves the right to request additional information not included in this Guidance Document.

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Definitions

Agriculture and Rural Paying Agency (ARPA): The Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency within the Ministry for the Agriculture, Fisheries and Animal Rights (MAFA)**Beneficiary:** the entity receiving funds through this measure which in this case shall be entities or bodies that will provide knowledge transfer and/or information actions to the profit of persons engaged in the agricultural, food and forestry sectors.

Checks and controls: Provide a means of verification that the investment operation complies with, and is in conformity to, the relevant rules and regulations.

Cost-effectiveness analysis: Compares the costs and effects of an intervention to assess the extent to which it can be regarded as providing value for money.

Contact Person: A person that is authorised by the applicant and can be contacted directly for matters in connection with the application.

CRRB: Change Request Review Board

EAFRD: European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.

EAFRD: regulation: Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of 17 December 2013 on support for rural development by the EAFRD, as amended.

FAS: Farm Advisory Service

End-beneficiary: The end beneficiaries receiving training under this measure

Evaluation: A periodic collection and analysis of evidence to form conclusions on the effectiveness and efficiency of interventions.

Grant Agreement (GA): An agreement signed between the MA and the selected applicant (beneficiary) containing provisions and conditions related to the support being given.

Grant Award Letter: A letter sent by the MA to selected applicants upon the completion of the selection process as to inform applicants of its outcome.

Holding: An agricultural holding, or holding or farm is a single unit, both technically and economically, operating under a single management and which undertakes agricultural activities.

Land Registration Identification System (LPIS): The system contains all agricultural areas, registered at the Front Office (ARPA) that may be eligible for a land-based measure under the Common Agricultural Policy.

Managing Authority (MA): A national or regional body designated by a Member State to manage a rural development programme.

Monitoring: Regular examination of the resources, outputs, and results of interventions.

Project Leader: Is a person who is authorised by the applicant to ensure a project is carried through and in line with commitments.

Project Selection Committee (PSC): An independent Committee that assesses and ranks applications.

Project Selection Appeals Board (PSAB): An independent Committee that assesses any submissions of appeals.

Results: The direct effects or changes that arise due to the intervention.

Rural Development Programme 2014-2022 (RDP): A document prepared by a Member State or region, and approved by the Commission, to plan and monitor the implementation of the rural development policy.

Simplified Cost Options (SCOs): Expenditure which is reimbursed according to PREDEFINED METHODS (translated into amounts/percentages) based on processes, outputs or results representing the BEST APPROXIMATION of real costs incurred when implementing an action.

Malta Further and Higher Education Authority (MFHEA): The MFHEA focuses on providing licensing and accreditation, quality assurance, recognition of qualifications against the MQF, mutual recognition of professional qualifications, validation of informal and non-formal learning and research and policy recommendation on issues related to further and higher education.

1.0 Introduction

These Guidance Notes are intended to assist Applicants understand the requirements for requesting and receiving funding support under Measure 1 – *‘Knowledge transfer and information actions’*, Sub-Measure 1.1 – *‘Support for vocational training and skills acquisition actions.’* Applicants for support under this measure are entities or bodies that will provide knowledge transfer and/or information actions to the profit of persons engaged in the agricultural, food and forestry sectors.

Applicants are advised to familiarise themselves with these Guidance Notes prior to filling in and preparation of the Application. The Guidance Notes, Application Form and all Annexes and other documentation are available at <http://www.fondi.eu>.

Applicants are reminded to check that they referred to the latest guidance notes as available on the website, and that they have filled in the latest available version of the application form that is available for download from the website. **Only the application available at the time of opening of batch will be accepted.**

2.0 Authorities

The Funds and Programmes Division (FPD) is the Managing Authority (MA) responsible for managing the measures of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development Fund (EAFRD) in accordance with the Rural Development Programme (RDP) for Malta for the 2014 – 2022 programming period.

The Paying Agency (PA) is the Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency (ARPA) within the Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries, and Animal Rights (MAFA)

2.1 Scope & Objectives

The main aim of this call is to continue to equip agricultural, food and forestry stakeholders with invaluable knowledge and skills which would allow them to meet the challenges that result from the evolving standards and demands of this sector in its broad form.

Service providers applying under this call are expected to develop and present tailor-made training programmes.

Training may include elements of both theory and practice, as well as different approaches including but not limited to formal as well as non-formal methods.

2.2 Duration

This Batch shall close on Thursday 6th June 2024, at noon (1200hrs Central European Time) subject to availability of funds and/or notifications by the MA informing otherwise.

2.3 Budget

The indicative budget available for this call is €3,300,000 (public expenditure). The MA reserves the right to amend the budget allocated.

2.4 Maximum Grant Value and Aid Intensity

The public aid granted under Measure 1.1 shall be 100% of the total eligible expenditure. **This is subject to State Aid or Non-State Aid limitations that may become applicable depending on the type of activity and the status of the applicant.**

3.0 Eligibility

3.1 Eligible Actions

Training provided by training bodies within and/or beyond Malta for one or more of the specific areas of need identified in the RDP 2014-2022. Some examples for training could include but not limited to the following:

- Organic
- IPMP
- Precision farming

In cases of lack of capacity, competence, expertise, or other justified reasons in organising a certain training course, or components thereof, in Malta, beneficiaries will be eligible to deliver such training, or components of such training, overseas.

3.2 Ineligible Actions

Training actions which are already part of established educational programmes or curricula are not eligible. This includes courses, which form part of normal education programmes or systems at secondary or higher levels.

Internal training¹ will not be eligible under this Measure.

3.3 Eligible Applicants

3.3.1 The service provider

The eligible applicant (in the sense of recipients of funds) for support under this measure are entities or bodies that will provide knowledge transfer and/or information actions to the profit of persons engaged in the agricultural, food and forestry sector.

Prospective private applicants shall be training providers with a current license with the MFHEA (as a training provider) as well as having at least one accredited course related directly/indirectly to the agricultural, food and forestry sector. The accredited course does not need to be included for funding under this call.

Prospective Public entities need to demonstrate their link to the agriculture, food or forestry sector.

To be eligible under this measure the beneficiary (service provider) shall provide evidence of the appropriate capacity of their staff in the provision of the knowledge transfer services. Therefore, they have to have the appropriate qualification and be regularly trained to conduct tasks proposed.

In addition, the service provider must have access to logistics appropriate to the specific training activity; have the technical and financial capacity required to carry out the specific training activities and not be in financial difficulty.

Support under this measure shall not include courses of instruction or training, which form part of normal education programmes or systems at secondary or higher levels.

To be eligible under this measure the applicants (service providers) shall provide evidence of the appropriate capacity of their staff in the provision of the knowledge transfer services. Therefore, they should have the appropriate qualifications and be regularly trained to conduct this task.

The applicants (service providers) will be required to demonstrate that they have as a minimum (engaged, subcontracted or assigned):

Programme Coordinator

A recognised undergraduate degree in Management or Training/Human Resource Development/Sciences or equivalent together with a minimum of 1 year experience in project

¹ Training will be considered as internal when it is conducted within an organisation to train its own staff and by using its own expertise.

management, preferably in a related field and ideally should have prior work experience on similar projects. Applicable certifications must be submitted at application stage.

Possess excellent communication, organisational and interpersonal skills and must be fluent in both written and spoken Maltese and English.

Trainers

The service provider shall engage or subcontract trainers who will be responsible for the delivery of the training modules as designed by the service provider and accepted by the Managing Authority. Such trainers are expected to be experts in the fields covered and possess a recognised, relevant undergraduate degree as well as relevant and demonstrable experience or have a minimum of 3 years' experience in the field they will be lecturing in.

In the case of trainers that are not fluent in spoken Maltese, the applicant is to explain how this will be addressed, keeping in mind the audience being targeted through that particular course.

The MA may also consider peer to peer training including farmer to farmer training. These farmers would need to prove they are experienced farmers (minimum 3 years registered as farmers on the IACS) and can deliver training as long as they are working under the supervision of a trainer who satisfies all the conditions for trainers as specified above. In the application form the applicant is to outline such approach.

3.3.2 The end beneficiary

The end-beneficiary under this measure will be the persons engaged in the agricultural, food and forestry sector.

3.4 Eligible Expenditure

Contracts with training bodies within and beyond Malta (full recognition with MFHEA remains applicable) to develop and deliver specific levels, types and amounts of training as defined for one or more of the specific areas of need.

Local Training

Support for training carried out locally will be financed through a simplified cost option rate which will be at the rate of €29.70/ per hour/ per participant with a maximum of 15 participants per class. This unit cost was established in line with delegated regulation (EU) 2015/2195, MT appendix.

The maximum number of hours that can be claimed in the form of training fees cannot exceed 8 hours per day and 40 hours per week per trainer.

Reimbursement will be calculated on the hours listed on attendance sheets.

Training carried out Abroad

In cases of lack of capacity, competence, or expertise or other justified reasons in organising a certain training course, or components/elements course in Malta, in part or in full, beneficiaries will be eligible to organise part/s of the training overseas. The trainer provider would need to provide adequate evidence that such training is not available in the territory of Malta. In such cases the following costs would be considered:

1. The training cost to attend the training;
2. Travel costs using the ERASMUS+ travel rates;
3. Per Diem Allowance same as used by public officials for Scale B for oversea duty travel according to the MF 201/92/B Letter Circular dated 18th October 2017.
4. For 'advanced' training sessions only and lasting at least one full day or longer: Cost of replacement o farmer is also an eligible expense. It means any person suitable to replace the farmer (head of the holding) when participating in training².

Fully documented payment claims submitted to the ARPA by June 2025 will be eligible for support. The MA retains the right to amend this set timeframes.

3.5 Additional Provisions

The PSC will review the course content and any courses deemed not relevant to farmers and the agricultural, food and forestry sector will not be considered eligible for this call.

The number of hours of the course need to be realistic in view of the audience involved and the topic. For courses which are to also satisfy the AECM/AECC/Eco schemes obligations, they need to be a minimum of 8 hours, including formal and non-formal training.

State Aid assessment for applications received under this measure will be undertaken during the evaluation of the same applications. This assessment will be based upon the type of beneficiary, their economic activity and the nature of the project. Documentation to conduct such assessment may be requested and the applicant will be informed accordingly prior to the signing of the grant agreement. The applicant will be notified accordingly on the assessment vis-à-vis state aid, prior to the signing of the grant agreement.

² Rate of replacement support will be communicated at a later stage but in all cases will be a rate as per the Malta RDP 14-22.

3.6 Complementarity and demarcation with other measures

Being a horizontal measure relevant for all of priorities for the Rural Development Programme and targeting the five thematic areas of need, this intervention compliments actions undertaken in the framework of measures supported under the Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2022

4.0 Filling out Part A – Administrative Forms

- **Project Title:** Name your project in a way that it can be easily understood and captures the gist of your project. Must be within 15 words.
- **Project Duration:** The deadline for all projects under Measure 1.1 will be end of March 2025. Extensions beyond this date may be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- **The Applicant:** Tick the box according to the type of entity.
- **Applicant's Information:** Fill-in details of applicant, project leader and details of partnership (if applicable)
- **VAT Status:** Fill-in details of Value Added Tax (VAT)
- **Details of the contact person for the application:** In case a third party (such as consultant/advisor) is filling in this application and will be responsible for any queries in relation to the application, then the information of the contact person is to be entered here.

5.0 Filling out Part B – Technical Description

5.1 Course Details

Training Course details: Project Description forms an integral part of the Application Form, and all Sections have to be completed by the Applicant for such applications to be eligible under this intervention.

Applicant will also need to list the following in the application:

- Course name
- Target audience for the course

- Location of training (local training, training carried out abroad, training including components both locally and *abroad*).
- Short description of proposed course

5.2 Envisaged course hours and students

Applicant is to fill in table 1 in cases of local training or table 2 in cases of training carried out abroad. In cases applicant will deliver both, applicant needs to fill both tables.

In cases of training abroad applicant also needs to provide justification why there is lack of capacity, competence or expertise in organising such training course in Malta.

5.3 Selection Criteria

Project Indicators (20 marks): This section needs to feature how the project will contribute to the cross-cutting objectives, focus areas and needs of the Rural Development Programme 2014-2022 which are explained in the section below. Tick accordingly and provide a brief overview how the project fits within the objectives and needs.

Contribution to cross-cutting objectives and focus areas and needs

Applications for support will be considered based on their contribution to one or more of the following cross cutting objectives, focus areas and needs³.

Contribution to Cross-Cutting Objectives

Project proposals under expenditure for genetic resources conservation are expected to contribute to one or more of the following cross-cutting objectives:

1. Environment: Support to the conservation of local genetic resources will lead to the reversal of biodiversity decline.
2. Climate change mitigation and adaptation: Support in conservation, sustainable use and development of genetic resources in agriculture have beneficial effects through making Maltese agriculture more adaptable and resilient to climate change.
3. Innovation: Support for Maltese indigenous tree species and breeds of livestock, offer potential for further product development, enabling micro-enterprise and SMEs to develop niche products for the Maltese market and for tourism.

³ For further details on the Focus areas and cross-cutting objectives, please refer to chapter 8 of the RDP 2014-2022 'Agri-environment-climate, section 8.2.7.2 'General description of the measure including its intervention logic and contribution to focus areas and cross-cutting objective'.

Contribution to Focus Areas

Project proposals under this Sub-Measure are expected to contribute to one or more of the following focus areas⁴:

1. Focus Area 4A: restoring, preserving and enhancing biodiversity, including Natura 2000 areas and high nature value farming, and the state of European landscapes.
2. Focus Area 4B: Improving water management, including fertiliser and pesticide management
3. Focus Area 4C: Improving soil management
4. Focus Area 5E: fostering carbon sequestration in agriculture and forestry.

Contribution to the Needs of the Rural Development Programme

Applicants are also required to demonstrate how their proposed projects shall result in the achievement of certain targets by clearly outlining the proposed project's contribution to one or more of the following needs that have been identified in the Malta Rural Development Programme (RDP)⁵:

Need 1: Water, Wastes and Energy:

Energy, water and waste management are closely linked and all exhibit current weaknesses which are linked in part to a lack of awareness and expertise among the farm population, to achieve improved management. Farmers require increased capacity to deal with the challenges faced by Malta's agriculture and rural development in order to ensure their future sustainability.

Given the state of Malta's water reserves and its current dependence upon increasingly high-cost imported fuels and other inputs, it is a priority for primary producers and other stakeholders to have improved knowledge and understanding in the following topics:

1. Nutrient budgeting
2. Efficient water management and use
3. Cropping practices to minimise water and energy use

Need 2: Maltese Quality Produce

Projects will be funded to improve the competitiveness of rural businesses through adding value to their primary production of goods and services.

Possibilities for funding include projects targeting the following topics:

4. Realistic options and techniques for adding value to primary produce
5. Developing and managing brands and quality marks to add value

Need 4: Landscape and environment

In order to encourage better management and protection of the rural environment, proposals should encourage interventions which include:

6. Improved understanding of the relationship between agricultural practice and natural processes and ecosystems, effective stewardship and management, and good practice in sustainable techniques.

⁴ Certain aspects of these focus areas shall not be applicable for the purpose of this call, according to the actions that are eligible. More details on eligibility of actions are provided in subsequent sections.

⁵ Certain aspects of these needs shall not be applicable for the purpose of this call, according to the actions that are eligible. More details on eligibility of actions are provided in subsequent sections.

Need 5: Wider rural economy and quality of life

The most significant needs in relation to the wider rural economy relate to helping rural producers and processors to make positive and stronger links with the tourism market.

Preference will be given to applications in which the project proposal targets more than one indicator and/or contributes considerably towards the relevant measure indicators.

Preparedness/Readiness (10 marks): Readiness refers to project proposals that are in an advanced state of preparedness such as quotations having already been gathered, necessary permits obtained etc. Kindly list the activities envisaged within the operation that requires a planning or an environmental permit, identify whether the permit application has already been submitted and if yes list down the PA or Tracking number.

Organisational Capacity⁶ (20 marks): The applicant will be assessed based on the experience they have in the management of similar project and the plan to engage necessary persons to successfully implement the project. This section also focuses on project sustainability, where the applicant has to describe how the project will lead to benefits to the general rural area, even after the project has been completed. Benefits may be related to environmental, social, economic, aesthetic and tourism.

Cost Effectiveness⁷ (20 marks): Cost effectiveness refers to evidence added value, effectiveness and reasonableness of costs proposed. The outputs and outcomes of the proposal should be proportionate to the level of funding offered. Project deliverability will also be assessed on the basis of whether competitive quotes have been sought, clear rationale in cases where the lowest valid offer is not chosen whether the costs are realistic and whether the application shows how the project will be successful at the end of the contract.

Complementarity (10 marks): This refers to the potential of the proposed project to lead to funding opportunities under other measures/funds. Indicate under which programmes the project or its extension could be supported. Furthermore, list the actions that will complement other projects being implemented at international, national and/or entity level.

Horizontal Priorities (20 marks): The applicant should ensure that the proposed intervention/s contribute towards the promotion of equal opportunities, equality, non-discrimination and improved accessibility whilst targeting sustainable development in the areas of economic growth, social cohesion and environmental protection. Consideration will be made of whether the applicant has a gender mainstream strategy, an appropriate policy on equality and diversity (e.g. as an employer), access requirements have been taken into account (e.g. for buildings, websites), and whether any jobs created are open to a diverse range of applicants.

Innovation (40 marks): Points awarded in relation to the degree of innovation showed in terms of the subject/elements being addressed by the training module/demonstration activities/exchanges as well as the methodologies to be used.

⁶ Applicants will be required to obtain a minimum of 10 marks from this selection criterion.

⁷ Applicants will be required to obtain a minimum of 10 marks from this selection criterion.

Publicity & Visibility: Beneficiaries are obliged by Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 808/2014 to acknowledge support from the Fund through plaques or billboard depending on the Grant Amount. Beneficiaries are to follow publicity obligations as stipulated in the Visual Identity Guidelines⁸

6. Documents to be submitted with the Application.

A checklist of documents to be submitted with the Application is attached to the Application Form. The applicants will be advised further, during the evaluation process, with regards to the submission of any necessary clarifications/documents required.

7. Acknowledgement

An acknowledgement shall be issued by the receiving officers upon submission of an application form, as per instructions in section above.

Disclaimer: The person receiving the application is not responsible for the administrative compliance of the application form. This issuance of this acknowledgement letter does not imply that the applicant has submitted all the necessary documentation.

8. Contact Details of Competent Authorities

- The Tax Compliance Certificate can be acquired by contacting of the Commissioner for Revenue

Tel No: 22962755

Email: Certificates.mtca@gov.mt

OR

Using the E-ID online services

⁸ <https://fondi.eu/visual-identity-guidelines-2021-2027/>

9. Assessment and selection

9.1. Validation of applications

The MA will undertake a validity check of all applications that are received.

Should any documentation that is required be missing from the Application Form, the MA shall notify the Applicant through a notification letter. Any required documents that were missing from the Application Form are to be submitted within the specified period from the date of the notification letter.

Each application will nonetheless be forwarded for the PSC assessment. Only complete applications will be considered by the Project Selection Committee. Applications that remain incomplete after the specified notice period has elapsed will be rejected.

Should the applicant wish to re-submit an application, the process is considered a new one. In such cases, the effective application date would be that of the new submission.

9.2. Assessment of Applications

Eligible applications shall be assessed and ranked based on selection criteria relevant to the Measure.

The Project Selection Committee (PSC) will award marks according to the criteria and rank projects according to the marks obtained. In order to qualify for selection, the proposal needs to obtain at least 50% of the total marks of the general and measure-specific selection criteria.

The selection of projects may be limited by the available budget, in which case the highest-ranking projects will be offered a grant.

9.3. Eligibility Criteria

All valid applications shall be assessed against the eligibility criteria that have been established for the RDP 2014-2022. Eligibility criteria consist of two sets: general eligibility criteria and measure-specific eligibility criteria.

It is important to note that all applications need to conform to/fulfil ALL general and measure-specific eligibility criteria in order to be considered for ranking and selection.

The MA reserves the right to revise the eligibility criteria applicable to the Measure, subject to pre-notification.

9.3.1. General Eligibility Criteria

The following are the general eligibility criteria to which the application must conform:

- Submitted application is fully completed/filled-in
- Applicant demonstrates that the applicant forms part of (or is the legal representative) the beneficiary/applicant organisation.
- The proposed project will be implemented within the eligible territory.
- Evidence of sufficient financial capacity required to cover the private financial component (where applicable) is provided.
- The proposed project contributes to the targets and objectives of the relevant measure/s.
- The proposed project contributes to at least one indicator target.

9.3.2. Measure-Specific Eligibility Criteria

The following are the measure-specific eligibility criteria to which the application must conform:

- Entities organising and providing knowledge transfer/training, demonstration activities or exchanges
- Possess minimum qualifications/requirements
- Access to necessary logistics for proposed activity
- Possess required technical and financial capacity
- Training provided does not form part of established education system

Furthermore, please also refer to section 3.3.1 (*The Service Provider*).

9.4. Selection of Proposed Investments

For a project to be considered for funding, it must obtain at least 50% of the marks available in total (both general and measure-specific criteria). Projects will be ranked according to marks and funds allocated to those projects which obtain the highest marks. In cases of over-demand for funding, other projects which obtain the pass mark, but which are not funded/selected will be placed on a reserve list according to marks obtained and funding offered if and when funds become available.

9.5. Unsuccessful applicants

The MA will inform all applicants about the outcome of the selection process.

9.6. Appeals

Applicants who feel aggrieved by the outcome of the procedure have the right of appeal with the Project Selection Appeals Board (PSAB) within five (5) working days from the date of the letter of rejection by the PSC.

The same application cannot be considered as being under PSAB and PSC consideration concurrently. As stated above, only the application undergoing a PSAB procedure will be under consideration (by the PSAB).

9.7 Letter of Acceptance

The MA will proceed to write to the successful applicants informing them of the decision of acceptance of their project. Scanned copies of the letter shall also be submitted through email. Letters of acceptance may include conditions which have been raised by the PSC.

9.8 Grant Agreement

Applicants whose proposals for investments have been selected in accordance with the procedure described above, in terms of being eligible and having obtained the necessary scoring for selection, and furthermore, could be allocated the requisite budget for funding, shall be invited to enter into an agreement with the MA by signing the Grant Agreement. More details on the generic provisions applicable in the Grant Agreement and the contractual obligations of the Beneficiary are provided in the subsequent sections. Selected applicants that do not come forward to sign the grant agreement within stipulated timeframes will have the award withdrawn.

9.9 Changes

The beneficiary organisation shall undertake every effort to ensure that the project is implemented within the stipulated timelines as defined in the broad project actions, and in line with the relevant EU and National Regulations and administrative procedures.

The Beneficiary shall not strategically change or alter the overall and broad project scope and actions. Significant and strategic changes that alter the scope of the project must be agreed to by the Managing Authority in the Change Request procedure published by the MA. Strategic changes applied to the project that do not bear the MA approval would be done at the applicant's own risk and will be assessed at the payment stage of the project.

In case the beneficiary fails to follow the timelines defined in the Grant Agreement may lead to recoveries of funds by ARPA or termination by the MA.

Projects with a grant value of equal or less than EUR100,000 shall be limited to two (2) change request submissions, including extension requests, whereas projects with a grant value of more than EUR100,000 but less than or equal to EUR200,000 shall be limited to three (3) change request submissions. The limit of change request submissions applies for the entire duration of the project. For the avoidance of doubt, the limitation is subject to the number of submissions and not the amount of changes requested per submission. Furthermore, the limitation still applies in case the MA rejects the request in part or in its entirety.

The Change Request Form can be downloaded from the Managing Authority website from the following link: http://fondi.eu/important_documentat/earfd-templates/

10. Contractual Obligations

Upon signing the Grant Agreement, the Beneficiary becomes legally bound by certain provisions. The following sections provide information on some aspects of the contractual obligations of the Beneficiary.

The Managing Authority and Agriculture and Rural Paying Agency (ARPA) may, from time to time, issue additional information and guidance.

10.1. Durability of Investment

Not applicable for this Measure

10.2. Documentation

Beneficiaries are obliged to retain all supporting documentation for a two (2)-year period from 31 December following the submission of the accounts in which the final expenditure of the completed operation is included. Where applicable a signed inventory, listing any items bought in connection with the project, should be compiled and held on site and this should be made available to ARPA whenever requested.

Where applicable, the beneficiary shall be responsible to collect the relevant baseline as well as data to be able to measure progress on the indicator and shall update the progress achieved towards these targets when required by the Managing Authority.

10.3. Procurement

Not applicable for this Measure since a system of Simplified Cost Options (SCOs) is being utilised

10.4. Controls and Penalties

Beneficiaries must note that by signing the Grant Agreement they are agreeing to undertake an obligation for the relevant checks and controls by the respective Authorities including the following:

- a. The Paying Agency (PA) – Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency (ARPA), Ministry for Agriculture, Fishing, and Animal Rights (MAFA),
- b. The Certifying Body (CB) – Internal Audit and Investigations Department (IAID), Office of the Prime Minister (OPM),
- c. The National Audit Office (NAO) in view of the fact that public funds are being utilised for the implementation of the investment,
- d. The Audit Services of the European Commission (EC) and the European Court of Auditors (ECA) in view of the fact the investment is benefitting from European Union (EU) funds,
- e. The VAT Department to ensure that VAT Regulations are respected.

The following sections are intended as a guide on applicable checks and controls.

10.4.1. Administrative checks on support applications

Administrative checks on applications for support shall ensure the compliance of the operation with applicable obligations established by Union or national law or by the rural development programme, including those of public procurement, State aid and other obligatory standards and requirements.

The checks shall, in particular include verification of:

- the eligibility of the beneficiary.
- the eligibility criteria, commitments, and other obligations of the operation for which support is requested.
- compliance with the selection criteria.
- the eligibility of the costs of the operation, including compliance with the category of costs or calculation method to be used when the operation or part of it falls under Article 67(1)(b), (c) and (d) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013⁹.

10.4.2. Administrative checks on payment claims by the paying agency (ARPA)

Once a Beneficiary's project proposal is selected and awarded a grant, the beneficiary will be invited to enter into a Grant Agreement with the Managing Authority (MA). Following the signature of the Grant Agreement and subject to the eligibility rules of the specific measure, a Beneficiary may start to submit payment claims to the Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency (the Agency) for processing, verification and ultimately payment authorisation.

Kindly note that the ARPA Payment Guidelines can be accessed on the <https://arpa.gov.mt/>

⁹ Simplified costs option

11.0 Compliance with Community Policy

11.1 General Principles

It is the responsibility of the Beneficiary to ensure compliance with Community Policy, namely and as applicable:

- a. Public Procurement
- b. Equal Opportunities
- c. Sustainable development

11.2 Equal Opportunities and Non-discrimination

Beneficiaries are required to take a pro-active approach to Equal Opportunities and must ensure that at all stages of the implementation of the action/s consideration is given to Equal Opportunities.

Equal Opportunities and non-discrimination are not meant to just address gender discrimination but have a wider scope and include race, ethnicity, religion or belief, disability, age and sexual orientation.

11.3 Sustainable Development

Beneficiaries should include Sustainable Development in their action/s and must ensure that the operation is structured in such a manner that concrete positive actions towards better sustainability and mainstreaming feature throughout. It is important that environmental matters should also be taken into consideration at all stages of the design, development and implementation of the action and the action should be structured to avoid any related environmental damage.

12.0 Data Policy

By submitting the application, the applicant is giving his/her consent to have personal and project details published in line with the obligations in the relevant EU Regulations and other requests by relevant bodies.

12.1 Data Protection

Whilst abiding to the provisions set in the Data Protection Act regarding the handling of personal data, the Managing Authority and/or Paying Agency will retain the right to disclose, exchange or request information about any applicant, application, and agreement to or with other organisations or consultants which the Managing Authority and/or Paying Agency consider appropriate for administration, statistical, monitoring, evaluation and dissemination purposes.

12.2 Transparency

Because projects implemented under this Measure involve expenditure of public money, there is public interest in how the money is spent. In this respect the Managing Authority will ensure that the principle of transparency is fully respected in the implementation of operations under Malta's Rural Development Programme 2014-2022.

Annually, and by no later than 30th May of each year, the Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency (ARPA) is bound to publish a list of beneficiaries who received payment during the preceding financial year (16th October to 15th October) in line with Regulation (EU) No 1306/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council.

12.3 Monitoring, Evaluation and Dissemination

From time to time, the Managing Authority and/or the Paying Agency, as well as other National and/or EU entities as may be identified by the Managing Authority, may conduct economic, environmental, or other evaluation of the measure which may involve the beneficiary in surveys/interviews of various types. Managing Authority officials or consultants/evaluators engaged by the Managing Authority may contact beneficiaries as necessary. In applying for support under this measure the beneficiary is deemed automatically as agreeing to cooperate with or take part in such studies, which are important for reviewing the effectiveness of the measure as well as evidencing implementation of projects. The MA may also request cooperation from beneficiaries vis-à-vis promotion of the RDP, including use of pictures/videos taken from projects supported through this measure.

Two of the reporting requirements that the Managing Authority requires are the Project Progress Report and the Project Closure Report. The Project Progress Report (PPR) is designed to monitor the implementation of RDP projects and includes brief description of the major achievements achieved through a specific time period. The Project Closure Report (PCR) is designed to evaluate the implementation of RDP projects and includes brief description of the major achievements registered. The final payment claim will not be issued unless the PCR is satisfactorily compiled by the beneficiary. The MA reserves the right to request other reports, as required.

13.0 Contact Details

For more information regarding this Measure kindly contact the Funds and Programmes Division.

Address:

The Oaks Business Centre, Block B, Triq Farsons, Hamrun HMR 1321, Malta

Telephone Number: (+)356 2555 2634

E-mail: rsubmissions.mees@gov.mt

Website: www.fondi.eu