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NGI Mobifree Guide for Applicants

This page provides some guidance for people applying to the NGI Mobifree calls.

Mobifree is a consortium funded by the European Commission to further develop free and open source mobile platforms, applications and framework. In addition to its own work, the NGI Mobifree Consortium will competitively award 670 000 € worth of grants (15% of its total budget) to independent researchers in the period

between December 1st 2023 and November 30th 2026. For the deadline of the calls please check the main information page. In principle there are continuous open calls, until the budget is allocated in line with the objectives of the Next Generation Internet — and the Mobifree programme in particular.

If you want to know details about the type of activities that qualify for financial support, or who can apply, please check the eligibility information. This page details the entire procedure, the results to be obtained, the competitive criteria for awarding financial support, and the criteria for calculating the exact amount of the financial support.

Criteria for awarding financial support

Projects are judged on their **technical merits**, **strategic relevance** to the Next Generation Internet and the topics within Mobifree, and overall **value for money**. The key objective is to deliver potential break-through contributions to the open internet. All scientific outcomes **must** be published as open access, and any software and hardware **must** be published under a recognised open source license in its entirety.

First stage of the assessment

Based on the submitted proposals, projects receive a first check for **eligibility** in terms of alignment of goals and criteria with the sub-granting call. In this stage hard eligibility ("knock-out") criteria specific to the sub-granting call are checked. Project proposals are written in English and:

- should be in line with the NGI vision and the sub-granting call applied for
- should have **research** and **development** as their **primary** objective
- should satisfy any other hard eligibility criteria specific to the sub-granting call, such as having a clear European Dimension.

All projects that fail on any of these knock-out criteria, will **not** be further reviewed and will be marked ineligible. The rest of the projects will be given a score based on the proposal text as submitted. If multiple versions were submitted prior to the deadline, the last complete version will be used.

Projects receive an initial rating on three criteria:

Weight	Criterion
30%	Technical excellence/feasibility
40%	Relevance/Impact/Strategic potential
30%	Cost effectiveness/Value for money

The total weighted score of projects has to be above 5.0 (out of 7) to pass to the next stage.

The projects which are not taken into the second round are informed that their project is not selected, so that they may try to find funding elsewhere as soon as possible - or continue without additional funding.

Second stage of the assessment

The second stage is used to select strategic projects which not only satisfy the *minimal criteria*, but also have potentially a *lasting impact* on society. Projects are to be selected based on their potential contribution to the Next Generation Internet and its key drivers for change. In the second stage, the reviewers are able to ask additional clarifying questions and make (minor) suggestions to improve the quality and impact of the project.

This typically involves questions such as:

- what is the difference in approach to *existing projects U, V* and *W*
- how will you approach *complicating factor X*
- can you back up or validate *claim Y*
- have you considered collaborating with *complementary effort Z* or using *standard A*
- the rate you have applied for *task B* is very high compared to the perceived value of that task. Can you explain, or would you like to reconsider?
- can you clarify how you intend to make the outcome of the project (self)sustainable
- how does upstream *project D* feel about your application

In addition, the review team will do independent verification of facts, methods and claims. If necessary they verify relevant information through their expert network. This is done without revealing personally identifiable information, unless there is explicit consent from the submitter. The second stage typically lasts three weeks. If a project is unable to prepare all the answers to the questions and/or a modified proposal within the allocated time frame, the project may be moved to the next call. Note that the proposed project budget may change during this phase due to e.g. added or deleted project milestones.

After the interactive part of the second stage is completed, new ratings are calculated based on the revised plan. If the revised plan scores lower than the original proposal, the original proposal is rated. The result is a ranking of projects that reflects the overall expected value and the relative impact in the context of the NGI initiative, starting with the project with the highest weighted rating and going down to the lowest weighted score. The cut off point is a weighted score of 5/7, unless there is not enough remaining budget left to fund all projects that have received this ranking - in which case the ranking is followed until there is no more available budget. The projects that fall below the cut are (similar to the first round) informed that their project is not selected, so that they may try to find funding elsewhere as soon as possible - or continue with their current funding.

Independent review committee

An independent review committee checks the final selection of projects. The review committee consists of independent experts from the internet and open source field, academia and the public sector. The committee receives no remuneration for its work, and its members have no other economic interests with the programme and/or links to NLnet Foundation as the grant-making organisation. Each project is individually reviewed for eligibility by at least two members of the review committee.

The outcome of the selection process is randomly divided among the members of the Review Committee. At least two members independently validate that all the projects that are nominated are indeed eligible for funding, budgets are frugal, and that there are no other concerns. This creates a transparency trail with regards to eligibility and cost effectiveness of the proposed solutions, while retaining confidentiality of the preceding procedure. If a project fails to meet the criteria of the independent review committee, the concerns are sent to the proposer and the project is pushed back to the next available call.

Criteria for calculating the exact amount of the financial support,

The amount to be granted to each third party should be the amount **necessary to achieve the key objectives** of the action. During the three stage review process, the overall 'value for money' and strategic potential of the proposal are part of the review, and thus of the ranking.

We have a rapid succession of project funding opportunities, so we can **iterate** and **grow** talent instead of having a 'leap of faith' with a select few projects. Excellent teams that have successfully completed their project, can apply for additional funding again — provided that higher amount is necessary and delivers enough

additional value. They are judged along the same criteria as the rest of the people in the grant round they are entering.

Proposals must adhere to the following boundary conditions:

- A single proposal MAY request a grant allocation up to **50 kEuro**.
- A **significant part** of the work within a project MUST have been successfully completed before an amendment to the project or a new propoposal from the same applicant can be awarded: this means that the project deliverables have been made publicly available under recognised open/free licenses, that any software artefacts delivered were WCAG compliant, and that the outcomes of any third party audit have been satisfactorily dealt with.
- If a grantee seeks an amendment or new grant, the outcomes of the previously delivered work are taken into account during the evaluation.

The exact amount of financial support is determined by NLnet based on the *projected cost* and *estimated value* of the proposition. Any proposed amount is to be adjusted for costs that are deemed *ineligible* (see above) as well as for the cost of any additional activities recommended by NLnet. The final amount is established in the memorandum of understanding between NLnet and the grantee. If the grantee does not agree with the size of the grant offered, they may decline and withdraw the proposal prior to signing the MoU at any time.

NLnet as the grant handling organisation is a recognised public benefit organisation, and the goals of NGI are within its statutory mission. Any grants that will be handed out, to individuals, companies, NGO's or other types of legal entities are donations that fall under the most beneficial tax conditions as 'charitable gifts'.

Maximum amount to be granted to each third party

The maximum amount to be granted per third party over the lifetime of NGI Mobifree is 60 kEuro. A third party can be an organisation or an individual.

Example Memorandum of Understanding

Curious what a typical Memorandum of Understanding looks like? Of course every MoU is specific, but do feel free to quickly glance over an example MoU to get an idea of what it looks like.

- Example Memorandum of Understanding

Conflict of interest resolution

The reviews within this programme are done by full time professional staff of a recognised and professionally audited public benefit organisation with a significant track record (NLnet foundation), hired to perform impartial and objective project reviews without economic interest, political or national affinity. Every project is reviewed by multiple full time staff members, and independently from that all projects proposed for funding are again reviewed by multiple well-regarded experts from academia, the internet world and the public sector.

Institutional conflicts of interest

As the organisation responsible for performing the reviews within this programmer, NLnet foundation offers strong guarantees it does not in any way have any financial or other benefit from awarding certain proposals over others. Note that NLnet foundation is entirely independent, and has been so ever since it was founded in 1989. NLnet currently has no organisational ties with other legal entities — with the noted exception of its wholly owned fiscal fundraising entity Commons Caretakers, which for obvious reasons is excluded from requesting grants from this programme. As part of managing its own financial endowment, NLnet has some small historical investments in SME companies and small investment funds. Companies financially invested in by NLnet are also explicitly excluded from receiving any grants through this programme.

Although they are not in any way involved with the review, the other legal entities that are part of the consortium and their staff are also fully excluded from requesting and receiving grants through the programme. This avoids conflicts of interest within the consortium.

Personal conflicts of interest

Reviews are performed by full time professional staff, hired to perform impartial and objective project reviews without economic interest, political or national affinity. For obvious reasons, NLnet staff are not allowed to have any financial or other personal benefit from grant proposals they are responsible for reviewing in any way either — other than the longer term public benefit. This allows them to fulfil their tasks in an impartial manner. The same holds for those people with which the reviewers have close family ties (spouse, domestic or non-domestic partner, child, sibling, parent etc.), and for any legal entities in which NLnet (or its staff) may hold stocks, shares or other economic rights.

Independent review committee

The standing review committee consisting of independent experts from the technical and academic internet community and the public sector validates the outcome of the selection procedure of each round on criteria of eligibility and budgetary efficiency. To ensure their independence, the members of the review committee are not attached to any of the consortium partners within the programme as employee, member of the board of directors or member of the board of supervisors.

Members of the independent review committee, their employers, their co-workers and their relatives are themselves excluded from submitting projects to the programme.

Membership of reviewers in associations and not-for-profits

Note that the above explicitly does allow for past and present non-remunerate involvement of NLnet staff in not-for-profit legal entities serving the public interest, including those that were part of previously funded efforts within its funding programmes in which the partners were involved. This also includes paid and unpaid (board) membership of professional or ideological organisations such as ACM, IEEE, Internet Society, FSF, ICANN, OSI and Unix user groups, legal umbrellas such as The Commons Conservancy and OW2 as well as open standards bodies like OASIS and W3C.

Submissions from those organisations (and other people involved with them) are not considered to constitute a conflict of interest. The 'reviewer paradox' is similar to the more classical 'observer paradox': in order to be able to properly review the relevance of proposed R&D at the cutting edge of technology, reviewers have to have a level of knowledge that only exists within the R&D ecosystem itself.

We believe it would not be proportional to exclude members of associations and volunteers within not-for-profits to exclude them from receiving support through thi programme, and we believe the ample additional quality assurances and third party checks made allow for this sane approach.

Non-commercial constituencies

As mentioned before, all legal entities that are part of the programme consortium and their paid staff are excluded from requesting and receiving grants through the programme. This actively blocks any applications from the entire paid staff from the organisations within the consortium as well as the leadership involved with the programme: there is a 'Chinese wall' between the projects which are funded and the partners supporting the projects.

We believe it would not be proportional and in fact be undesirable to categorically exclude the membership and volunteer constituencies of the not-for-profit organisations within the larger ecosystem from grants. Besides NLnet foundation, neither of the partners is involved in any way with the actual review of projects and the resulting selection. The fact that people choose to contribute in an unpaid capacity to idealistic organisations that play an active and constructive role in e.g. the internet and libre-driven ecosystems should not affect their ability to receive funding for a possible contribution. In fact, the ability to reach motivated and qualified people aligned with the core mission of NGI is one of the reasons these organisations were involved in the first place.

Given the clear and consistent separation between the rest of the consortium and the selection process, and the strong quality guarantees from the whole procedure, NLnet elected to place no restrictions on proposals from the non-commercial constituencies surrounding the consortium partners in the programme — with of course the noted exception of the coordinator and the organisation responsible for reviewing (NLnet foundation itself). Consortium members have been instructed to stay clear from project proposals from their constituencies, and are aware that failing to keep adequate distance to proposals from their constituencies will disqualify the proposals involved.

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NGI Zero is looking for Regional Representatives.

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Conversations with people building the Next Generation Internet

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