

**The European Community's
“Quality of Life and
Management of Living Resources Programme”**

**EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM
ON “INTEGRATED PROJECTS”
IN THE FIELD OF FUNCTIONAL GENOMICS
RELATING TO HUMAN HEALTH**

CONTENTS

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Summary**
- 3. Expressions of interest for topics for *integrated projects***
- 4. Proposals for *integrated projects***
- 5. Management and follow-up of *integrated projects***
- 6. Indicative timetable**

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Research Directorate-General
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www.cordis.lu/life

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper has been written in order to explain to the research community the purpose and modalities of the *integrated projects* that have been created under area 8.5 of the 2001 work programme of the EC research programme concerning the Quality of Life and Management of Living Resources (QoL). Further details are available through the QoL home page (www.cordis.lu/life/) or more specifically through the website dedicated to the *integrated projects* (www.cordis.lu/life/generic/integ_proj.htm).

2. SUMMARY

To unlock the enormous medical, social and economic potential of the human genome sequence, the links between genome structure, gene function, gene polymorphism and human disease need to be determined. This will be a long-term resource-intensive process, in which Europe needs to combine its efforts and achieve critical mass in order to remain competitive.

To assist in this strategic goal, the Quality of Life Programme is launching a new type of project, the “*integrated project*”, to stimulate progress in **functional genomics relating to human health**.

An *integrated project* will contain **three components** – research, networking, and training & mobility – within a common integrated management structure. Under the **research** component, the project will be expected to perform ground-breaking research. Under the **networking** component, the project should act as a federating force in the field, creating synergy with and between national research efforts. And under the **training & mobility** component, the project should provide opportunities to train young researchers at Europe’s top research centres in the field; a significant level of staff exchanges will also be expected. Each *integrated project* must include all three of these components.

To help ensure **critical mass**, an *integrated project* should contain a minimum of 150 researcher-years of effort (including the training component). The consortium will be expected to contain the top European research centres in the field.

Integrated projects will be selected by a procedure that involves, **first, a call for expressions of interest for topics** that may be suitable for support through an *integrated project*, out of which a limited number of key topics of strategic importance will be selected, **followed by a dedicated call for proposals** from which the *integrated projects* themselves will be selected. This procedure in two separate steps is intended to avoid an excessive oversubscription in the second step, which otherwise might act as a deterrent to applicants. The prior submission of an expression of interest will not be a requirement for being eligible to submit a proposal for an *integrated project*.

Integrated projects have also been designed to give a measure of **autonomy** to the research consortium. For example, the contract(s) with the Commission will not contain a detailed programme of activity beyond the project’s first year, but will instead concentrate on the overall objectives of the project, its management structure and its deliverables. The evolution of a detailed programme of activity will

subsequently be determined by mutual agreement between the consortium and the Commission as the project proceeds. This evolutionary process will also enable the technical parts of the **proposals to be simplified**, thus easing the burden on the applicants.

In order to help promote scientific accountability, each *integrated project* will be expected to appoint an international **external scientific advisory board**, with its membership agreed jointly with the Commission. The board will advise the project, in particular on the periodic adoption of its detailed programme of activity. It will also report to the Commission on a regular basis on the scientific implementation of the project.

As part of its measures to ensure public accountability, the Commission will arrange for an exhaustive **mid-term review** of the project to be carried out by a panel of independent experts, in association with the project's scientific advisory board. In addition, the Commission will also appoint a project technical advisor (PTA) to assist the Commission's services in monitoring the operational, organisational and financial aspects of the project.

Finally, the concept of the *integrated projects* should lead to a widespread sharing and dissemination of results and thus enhance the prospects for their utilisation and exploitation.

The deadline for receiving the expressions of interest for topics is 9 February 2001. The dedicated call will subsequently be published at least three months before the 18 October 2001 deadline foreseen for receiving the proposals for *integrated projects*. Given the budgetary limitations, no more than three *integrated projects* are expected to be selected following this dedicated call.

3. EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST FOR TOPICS (EoI)

<i>When will the call be published?</i>	<p>The call for EoIs for topics that may be suitable for support through integrated projects will be published in the Official Journal on 15 November 2000.</p> <p>A special information package will be available on that date on the QoL website (www.cordis.lu/life/generic/integ_proj.htm). The information package will include guidance notes and describe the format for submitting an EoI.</p>
<i>With what deadline?</i>	<p>EoIs must be received at the address shown in the call on or before 9 February 2001 (17.00 Brussels time).</p>
<i>What is the purpose of the EoI?</i>	<p>The EoIs should enable the Commission, assisted by a panel of high-level experts, to select from among the topics presented those that would be most appropriate for support at the European level through the mechanism of an integrated project.</p>
<i>Who can submit an EoI?</i>	<p>An EoI may be submitted by any legal entity (or a consortium of legal entities) carrying out or sponsoring research in a Member State or a state associated to the QoL Programme.</p>
<i>On what topics?</i>	<p>EoIs are requested for topics throughout the field of functional genomics relating to human health, including computational genomics, comparative genomics and proteomics. Topics should exploit multidisciplinary approaches and advance the development and application of new methods and technologies.</p>

<p><i>How to prepare an EoI?</i></p>	<p>An EoI should be prepared in three sections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) a rationale for proposing the topic; (ii) a description of the potential consortium; (iii) supporting letters of intent (<i>optional</i>). <p>The <i>rationale</i> should not be more than three A4 pages. It should cover the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the strategic importance to Europe (for example in research, health or industry) of developing this aspect of functional genomics, including an assessment of Europe's prospects in the field compared with those of its principal competitors; • the current extent of pan-European cooperation in the field, both at the project and at the programme level, and an assessment of the benefits to be gained by increasing that cooperation; • the supply in Europe of suitably trained researchers in the field and an assessment of the need to stimulate training & mobility, particularly at the postgraduate and postdoctoral levels. <p>The <i>description of the potential consortium</i> should not be more than two A4 pages. It should demonstrate that a number of excellent research centres are interested to collaborate in presenting a proposal for an integrated project and with the capability to take full advantage of such a project. It should cover the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a listing of all the top academic and industrial European research centres in the field, together with a very short description of their competences and resources that would be relevant to an integrated project on the topic; and • the names of those centres that provisionally are ready to take part in a proposal for an integrated project on the topic. <p>As a guide to the preparation of this part of the EoI, it is expected that the core consortium of an integrated project would involve no more than ten such centres.</p> <p>The <i>letters of intent</i> should express the interest of research centres to take part in preparing a proposal for an integrated project. The author of the EoI should also indicate what role he/she might play in the preparation of such a proposal.</p> <p>Those submitting an EoI should also pay close attention to the evaluation criteria described below.</p>
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<p><i>What are the evaluation criteria?</i></p>	<p>The following five evaluation criteria, each with equal weight, will be applied to the topics described in the EoIs received:</p> <p>(1) Competence building</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent could an integrated project in the field assist in enhancing Europe’s scientific excellence? • To what extent would an integrated project in the field provide the necessary platform for excellence in training and skills development? <p>(2) Resources, partnership and management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent do the necessary resources, partnership and management exist in Europe to make effective use of the opportunities provided by an integrated project? <p>(3) Community added value</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent will European research benefit by promoting more pan-European cooperation in the field? • And to what extent could an integrated project help in that direction? <p>(4) Contribution to Community social objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent could an integrated project in the field contribute to improving human health? <p>(5) Economic development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent could progress in this aspect of functional genomics be of economic and industrial importance to Europe?
<p><i>How will EoIs be evaluated?</i></p>	<p>A panel of high-level experts, both European and non-European, will be asked to carry out the evaluation of the topics presented in the EoIs.</p> <p>The EoIs received will be mailed to the experts about two weeks after the deadline on 9 February 2001 so that they will have time to examine them before they meet as a panel in Brussels in the second half of March 2001.</p> <p>The panel will be asked to agree a ranked shortlist of no more than seven topics, from which the Commission will select a maximum of five topics to be published in the dedicated call.</p> <p>In drawing up their shortlist, the panel will be asked to bear in mind the need to avoid an excessive oversubscription, considering that no more than three integrated projects can be financed.</p> <p>At the conclusion of their work, the panel will write an evaluation report, justifying in detail their selection of topics and outlining why other topics were not selected. This report (excluding any commercially sensitive information) will be provided as feedback to all of those submitting EoIs. It will also be published on the QoL website and communicated to the QoL Programme Committee.</p>

<p><i>What is the subsequent selection procedure?</i></p>	<p>On the basis of the recommendations of the panel of experts, the Programme management will draw up a provisional list of up to five topics for the dedicated call for proposals for integrated projects. This provisional list will be discussed within the QoL Group of Directors and with the QoL Programme Committee (in April 2001). A final list will subsequently be decided by the Commission (in May 2001). If the topics on this final list differ from the topics at the head of the shortlist recommended by the panel of high-level experts, the reasons why will be explained in a note, also to be published on the QoL website.</p>
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4. PROPOSALS FOR INTEGRATED PROJECTS

<p><i>What is an integrated project?</i></p>	<p>Integrated projects are a new concept for supporting functional genomics in the QoL Programme. They are designed to achieve critical mass, high impact and high visibility:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• critical mass: each integrated project should contain a minimum effort of 150 researcher years;• excellence: the core consortium in the project should include Europe's top research centres in the field;• complementary activities: each project should contain three components – research, networking, and training & mobility – within a common integrated management structure;• ground-breaking research: the research component will be expected to perform ground-breaking research;• synergy with and between national programmes: the networking component should act as a federating force in the field, creating synergy with and between national (and international) research efforts;• strong training and mobility component: under this component, the project should provide opportunities to train young researchers at Europe's top centres in the field. A significant level of staff exchanges will also be expected;• relative autonomy for the researchers: the resulting contract with the Commission will not contain a detailed programme of activity beyond its first year. It will concentrate instead on the overall objectives of the project, its organisational structure and deliverables. The evolution of a detailed programme of activity will be decided by mutual agreement between the consortium and the Commission as the project proceeds;• simplified proposals: to ease the burden on applicants, the technical part of the proposals will be simplified, reflecting the evolutionary nature of the project's programme of activity;• effective monitoring and follow-up: each project will appoint an external scientific advisory board, with its members agreed jointly with the Commission, both to advise the project and to report regularly to the Commission on its scientific implementation. The Commission will also arrange for an exhaustive mid-term review by a panel of independent experts. In addition, the Commission will appoint a project technical advisor to assist it in monitoring operational, organisational and financial aspects of the project;• effective exploitation and dissemination of the results: the project will be expected to achieve a widespread sharing and dissemination of results and thus enhance the prospects for their utilisation and exploitation.
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<i>When will the call be published?</i>	<p>A dedicated call for proposals for integrated projects is expected to be published in the Official Journal at the latest in the second half of June 2001.</p> <p>A special information package will be available on that date on the QoL website. The information package will include guidance notes and application forms for submitting a proposal.</p>
<i>With what deadline?</i>	<p>Proposals for integrated projects must be received at the address shown in the call on or before 18 October 2001 (17.00 Brussels time).</p>
<i>What topics will be covered by the call?</i>	<p>The call will specify the topics (up to five) selected as a result of the November 2000 call for expressions of interest for topics. Each topic will concern one aspect of functional genomics relating to human health. Only proposals on those topics specified in the call will be considered eligible.</p>
<i>Who can submit and participate in a proposal?</i>	<p>The usual rules for participating in a proposal for a shared-cost action will apply. Thus, research centres outside the Member States and associated states may participate, though normally without funding from the Programme.</p> <p>The prior submission of an expression of interest will not be a requirement for being eligible to submit a proposal for an integrated project.</p>
<i>Is there guidance on the size of an integrated project?</i>	<p>An integrated project should contain a minimum of 150 researcher years of effort (including the training component). It is to be noted, however, that it is unlikely that any project will receive more than €15 million of Community support from the Programme.</p> <p>As a guide for applicants, it is expected that the core consortium of an integrated project would involve no more than ten centres. These core partners will probably carry out the bulk of the project's research component and will be responsible for managing the networking and training components. It is possible that a significantly larger number of research teams could be associated to the integrated project through its networking component already at the proposal stage. It is however envisaged that further partners may join the networking component as the project proceeds.</p>
<i>Is there guidance on the duration of an integrated project?</i>	<p>Applicants should propose a duration which they consider appropriate, given the objectives of their project and the resources available. Shared cost actions are normally of three years duration, but integrated projects for periods of up to five years will be considered, where there is a suitable justification.</p>

<p><i>How to prepare an integrated project proposal?</i></p>	<p>The information package that will be published together with the dedicated call will provide details on how to prepare the proposal. The technical part of the proposal will be presented as a single entity, integrating the three aspects of an integrated project: the research, the networking, and the training & mobility.</p> <p>The following issues will be among those that should be addressed in the proposal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • objectives of the project: the proposal should detail the objectives of each of the three aspects of the project (the research, the networking and the training & mobility) as well as any objective linked to the integration of these three aspects; • outline programme of activity: the proposal should outline the methodological approaches that will be employed in the three aspects and provide an overall schedule for the project, specifying important milestones. A detailed programme of activity will need to be proposed only for the first year of the project. Proposals requesting support for more than three years need careful justification; • partners and resources: for the core consortium, the proposal should describe the role of each of the partners, explaining how their expertise, competence and resources qualify them for major tasks allocated to them. For other participants, especially those involved in the networking activities, fewer details will be requested. Indeed, the list of participants involved in the networking will be allowed to evolve as the project proceeds; • organisation and management: the proposal should pay special attention to organisational and management aspects of the research, networking and training & mobility components and of their integration; • exploitation and dissemination: the proposal should carefully describe the prospects for exploitation and the plans for disseminating the results; • external scientific advisory board: the proposal should describe the role and the possible composition of the external scientific advisory board.
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<p><i>How will integrated project proposals be evaluated?</i></p>	<p>The evaluation procedure will be based on the Commission's manual of evaluation procedures and on the selection criteria laid down in Annex II of the QoL work programme (year 2001 edition). A vade-mecum detailing these procedures and interpreting the selection criteria in relation to the special nature of the integrated projects will be developed and published on the QoL website at the time that the call for proposals is made.</p> <p>Proposals will be evaluated in Brussels by a single panel of independent high-level experts, meeting in Brussels in a single session around the beginning of December 2001. It is expected that a high proportion of the experts will come from outside Europe.</p> <p>As set out in Annex II of the QoL work programme, the evaluation will be based on the following five blocks of criteria:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) scientific/technological quality and innovation; (2) resources, partnership and management; (3) Community added-value; (4) contribution to Community social objectives; (5) economic development and S&T prospects. <p>Each of the blocks of criteria will be scored out of five and will have an equal weight. Thresholds of four marks out of five will apply to the first two blocks. An overall threshold of three and a half, as an average score over all five blocks, will also apply.</p> <p>The panel will be asked to evaluate each proposal received and to draw up a ranked list of all proposals passing the thresholds. The panel will also be asked to prepare an evaluation summary report for each proposal to be sent as feedback to the applicant. In addition, for proposals passing the thresholds, the panel will be asked to provide negotiating guidance to the Programme management, for example in relation to the composition of the consortium, the objectives of the project, its organisation and management, financial and human resources, and the role and composition of the project's scientific advisory board.</p>
<p><i>What type of contract(s) will be negotiated?</i></p>	<p>When negotiating contract(s) for the successful proposals, the integrated project will be divided up into several component parts in order to be compatible with the forms of RTD action available to the QoL Programme. As a minimum, there will be three components: a shared-cost RTD action, covering primarily the research and development activities of the integrated project; a networking action (concerted action or thematic network), covering the networking aspects of the project, particularly the cooperation with research teams outside the core consortium; and a Marie Curie host fellowship component.</p>

5. MANAGEMENT AND FOLLOW-UP OF INTEGRATED PROJECTS

The integrated projects have been designed to give a measure of autonomy to the research consortium managing the project. In return, the Commission will create a system of close monitoring and project review.

<p><i>What is the role of the external scientific advisory board?</i></p>	<p>Each integrated project will have its own external scientific advisory board. The board will consist of independent high-level scientific experts in the field (European and non-European), appointed by the project with the agreement of the Commission.</p> <p>The board will advise the project on: its proposals for annual (or semi-annual) work programmes, considering always the research, networking and training & mobility components and their integration; on its selection of fellows under the Marie Curie host fellowship component; on its dissemination and exploitation activities; and, more generally, on any aspect of the project's implementation where it considers that it can make a useful contribution.</p> <p>The board will also provide the Commission annually with a brief assessment of progress within the three components of the project and with their integration.</p> <p>The Commission's project officer will attend meetings of the board.</p> <p>In its original proposal for an integrated project, the consortium should describe in further detail the role that it expects of the board and suggest its possible composition. This aspect of the proposal will be evaluated by the panel of evaluation experts. The role of the board will be set out in the resulting contract(s) with the Commission.</p>
<p><i>Who will conduct the project's mid-term review?</i></p>	<p>As part of its measures to ensure public accountability, the Commission will arrange for an exhaustive mid-term review of the project to be carried out by a panel of independent experts in association with the project's scientific advisory board.</p>
<p><i>What is the role of the project technical advisor?</i></p>	<p>The Commission will appoint a project technical advisor (PTA) primarily to assist the Commission services in monitoring the operational, organisational and financial aspects of the project. The PTA will also be able to advise the project on management issues. The PTA (normally together with the Commission's project officer) will attend all plenary meetings of the project consortium.</p>

6. INDICATIVE TIMETABLE

Activity	Indicative dates
<i>Call for expressions of interest for topics</i>	15 November 2000
<i>Deadline for receipt of expressions of interest</i>	9 February 2001
<i>Results of the evaluation of expressions of interest by a panel of experts</i>	March/April 2001
<i>Dedicated call for proposals for the integrated projects</i>	Second half of June 2001 (earlier if possible)
<i>Deadline for receipt of proposals for integrated projects</i>	18 October 2001
<i>Results of the evaluation of integrated project proposals by a panel of experts</i>	November/December 2001
<i>Start of contract negotiations with successful applicants</i>	December 2001
<i>Start of integrated projects</i>	Early 2002